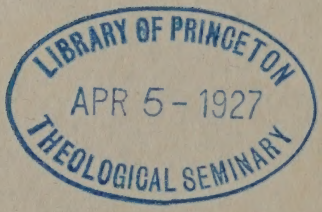
THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST. PETER THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN AND THE EPISTLE OF ST. JUDE

REV.
D. DAWSON WALKER, M.A., D.D.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY



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THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST PETER
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THE EPISTLE OF ST JUDE

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
Edited by the Rev. C. H. IRWIN, D.D.

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST PETER

THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF ST JOHN

AND THE EPISTLE OF ST JUDE

By the
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LONDON
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY
MANCHESTER, MADRID, LISBON, BUDAPEST

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

THE general aim that has been before the writer of the following pages is already indicated in the preface to a previous volume in this Series, the Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Titus.

Just as in that work, the intention here also has been to render some aid to the devout and careful English reader. The text of our Revised Version has been taken as the material for explanation, questions of variant readings and of verbal points that call for discussion in connection with the Greek text of the respective Epistles, only being mentioned in cases of necessity.

Various methods have been hitherto employed of commenting upon the Sacred text. In some cases the notes accompany the text at the foot of the page; in others, they stand apart at the end of the volume; in others, again, the notes are unaccompanied by a continuous text. The attempt is here made to mingle text and commentary indicating the words of Scripture by distinctive type, and interspersing such words of explanation as may help to make more clear the connection of the argument, and at the same time may serve to bring out the background of life and thought that lies behind the words. It is hoped that in this way the significance of the writers' words both for their age and for ours may be more fully realized.

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THE SECOND EPISTLE GENERAL OF ST PETER

INTRODUCTION

THE question of the authorship of 2 Peter is one of the difficult problems of New Testament criticism. Was the Epistle written by St. Peter, or by an unknown writer of the second century ? To some it may appear that there is no problem at all. The Epistle opens with the words " Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ " ; a little later, the writer, speaking of the Transfiguration, says : " We were with Him in the holy mount " ; and, at the opening of the third chapter, he says : " This is now, beloved, the second epistle that I write unto you ". The combination of these passages seems to amount to a perfectly clear claim that St. Peter was the writer, and the plain man is inclined to say : " It either was written by St. Peter or it is a forgery, and a very deliberate one at that."

To put the alternative in this way is misleading and unfair. It ignores the fact that the ancient conception of authorship was different from our modern one ; that it was not unusual for a writer to assume the name of a great teacher in order to gain a hearing for his book ; that if he succeeded in giving a fair presentment of the teaching of the man whose name he had assumed, there was not the slightest disposition to charge him with bad faith, or to invest him with the odium associated in our minds with " forgery ". It may be helpful, in this connection, to recall some very wise words of Dr. Plummer, himself

a stalwart upholder of the Petrine authorship. The words occur in his *Introduction* to 2 Peter in Ellicott's *New Testament Commentary for English Readers*. "The question," he says, "of the genuineness of the Epistle is one of immense interest and no small importance; but there is no terrible alternative before us. If, after all, we have to admit that the Epistle is possibly, or probably, or certainly, not the work of St. Peter, the spiritual value of the contents, both in themselves and in having received the stamp of the Church as canonical will remain absolutely unchanged; although, possibly, our own views of God's providence in relation to the canon of Scripture may require reconsideration and readjustment." In fact, to talk of "forgery" in this connection is entirely beside the point.

The present writer is one who would gladly welcome a convincing demonstration of the Petrine authorship, but who cannot resist the conclusion that the preponderating weight of evidence is on the other side. It may, perhaps, be of interest to indicate in brief outline, the considerations which seem to point to this conclusion. They are concerned with the external evidence, the style and language, the relation to St. Jude, and certain passages in the Epistle itself.

(1) It is generally agreed that, however the fact be explained, the external testimony to the Epistle is, compared with the case of most of the other New Testament books, very weak. There is very little reference to it in early patristic literature, the first clear mention being by Origen, who himself regarded it with suspicion. Eusebius, who has preserved for us

the record of Origen's view,[1] himself says: "As to the writing of Peter, one of his epistles, called the first, is acknowledged as genuine . . . But that which is called the second we have not indeed received by tradition to be in the canon; yet as it appeared useful to many, it was studiously read with the other Scriptures."[2] The Epistle was not acknowledged as canonical till the Council of Carthage in 397. The fuller details about the external testimony must be sought in larger works. But there is general agreement as to its comparative paucity, even on the part of those who make careful attempts to account for the fact.

(2) The evidence of the style and language can only be properly appreciated by those who read the Epistle in Greek. The style is rather grandiose and often obscure. The late Professor Moulton, than whom no one had a better right to speak on this aspect of the question, explains it thus: "2 Peter is unique in the character of its Greek." The writer "uses a Greek which appears to be learnt from rhetoricians or from books, an artificial dialect of big and unusual words, applied without the sure touch of a native". He further adds: "The instinct of the Church was well guided when through this fantastic dialect she heard accents which made good the claim that one little writing of the second century spoke truly and representatively of the first age of Christianity." It is of interest in this connection to note that some who maintain St. Peter's authorship are so impressed by the difference of style between 1 Peter and 2 Peter

[1] *Hist. Eccl.*, VI. xxv. 8. [2] *Hist. Eccl.*, III. iii. 1.

that they are compelled to postulate a difference of amanuensis. The difference, indeed, from 1 Peter is not only one of style. The extent of it has been well summed up by Professor Mayor: "On the whole the difference in style is less marked than the difference in vocabulary, and that, again, less marked than the difference in matter, while above all stands the great difference in thought, feeling, and character, in one word, personality." [1]

(3) The relation of 2 Peter to the Epistle of St. Jude, is a point of vital importance. That there is literary connection between them is certain; the question is, which writer has used the work of the other? It is not superfluous, here, to bear in mind that 2 Peter is the longer of the two Epistles. It has 61 verses, whereas St. Jude has only 25. It is, on general grounds, more likely that the writer of the longer work has expanded the contents of the shorter one, than that the writer of the shorter one has contracted the material of the larger one. It may help the reader to grasp better the points of contact between the two Epistles if the relevant passages are printed side by side.

Jude	2 Peter
4. For there are certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old set forth unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.	ii, 1–2. But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And

[1] Mayor, *St. Jude and 2 St. Peter*, p. cv.

JUDE	2 PETER
	many shall follow their lascivious doings; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of.
6. And angels, which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgement of the great day.	4. For if God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them unto pits of darkness to be reserved unto judgement;
7. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornification, and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.	6. And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, having made them an example unto those that should live ungodly.
8. Yet in like manner these also in their dreamings defile the flesh, and set at nought dominion, and rail at dignities.	10. But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement, and despise dominion. Daring, selfwilled, they tremble not to rail at dignities:
9. But Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing Judgement, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.	11. Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, bring not a railing Judgement against them before the Lord.
10. But these rail at whatsoever things they know not: and what they understand naturally, like the creatures without reason, in these things are they destroyed.	12. But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed.
11. Woe unto them! for they went in the way of Cain, and ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire.	15. Forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing.

JUDE	2 PETER
12. These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts when they feast with you, shepherds that without fear feed themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;	13. *men* that count it pleasure to revel in the day-time, spots and blemishes, revelling in their love-feasts while they feast with you.
	17. These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm;
13. Wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved for ever.	for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved.
16. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their lusts (and their mouth speaketh great swelling *words*), showing respect of persons for the sake of advantage.	18. For, uttering great swelling *words* of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error.
17. But ye, beloved, remember ye the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;	iii, 1. This is now, beloved, the second epistle that I write unto you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting
18. how that they said to you, In the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts.	2. you in remembrance; that ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles:
	3. knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts.

A study of the commentaries on the two Epistles reveals the different conclusions that are drawn from this comparison of passages, some holding Jude to be the earlier work, others 2 Peter. To the present writer it seems that the evidence points to the priority of Jude. The two sets of compared passages which

especially point in this direction are (*a*) Jude 6—2 Peter 4, where 2 Peter is vague and indistinct, whereas Jude gives clearly the ground of the condemnation of the angels ; and (*b*) Jude 9—2 Peter ii. 11, where the 2 Peter is almost unintelligible without Jude, which gives the clear specific instance to which reference is made, the case of Michael contending with the devil.

If the conclusion, as to the priority of Jude, be sound, then the likelihood of 2 Peter being by St. Peter is much diminished. It is very improbable that one of the leading apostles would plagiarize in such a way as to absorb almost the whole of an Epistle, by such a comparatively unknown writer as St. Jude. There is also the matter of the dates. If Jude was written about or after 65 A.D. and 2 Peter some time later, then the latter writing cannot well be brought within the lifetime of the apostle.

(4) The view that St. Peter was not the writer is reinforced by certain passages in the Epistle. The expressions " divine power " (i. 3) and " partakers of the divine nature " (i. 4) do not quite seem to belong to the first generation of Christian writers. The great concern, manifested in chapter iii to re-establish belief in our Lord's second coming, seems to be the mark of an age after that of the Apostles. It was after St. Peter and his fellow apostles had passed from the scene that such stinging point could be given to the derisive question : " Where is the promise of His coming ? " And, if " the fathers " in the phrase " from the day that the fathers fell asleep " be taken to refer to the Apostles and original Evangelists, it would seem to indicate that they were dead when the

Epistle was written. Finally, the putting of St. Paul's Epistles on a level with the Old Testament Scriptures, as the writer seems to do in iii. 16, seems to belong more naturally to the second century than the first.

The view here propounded is maintained by Dr. Chase in Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible*, and by Professor Mayor. Those who wish to see strong and scholarly vindication of the Petrine authorship may do so in Salmon's *Introduction to the New Testament*, Plummer's commentary in Ellicott's *New Testament Commentary for English Readers* and Bigg's edition in the *International Critical Commentary*. The view of Chase and Mayor may fairly be said to be winning general acceptance on the part of more recent scholarship. If the whole history of the debate be taken into account, from the time of Origen till the present day, it may be truly said that the genuineness of this Epistle has been more questioned than that of any book in the New Testament.

CHAPTER I

I

GREETING AND ENUMERATION OF GOD'S GRACIOUS GIFTS

" Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power have granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue; whereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust."—2 PETER i. 1–4.

2 Peter i. 1–4. The Writer and his aim.

Reference has been made, in the *Introduction*, to the difficulties that arise in connection with the question of the authorship of this Epistle. In the following attempt to explain its contents to the reader of the English version the standpoint there adopted will be maintained; we shall assume that the Epistle is the work of some unknown Christian teacher who wrote about the middle of the second century A.D., using the name and authority of St. Peter to controvert the erroneous doctrines and practices then prevalent. The Christian Church has made this writer's teaching her own by giving it a place in the Canon of sacred Scripture. It will therefore be our wisdom, as it is our privilege, to study and to profit by it.

2 Peter i. 1–4. A Servant of Jesus Christ.

In the opening sentence St. Peter is described as the **servant and apostle of Jesus Christ**. The margin of the R.V. by its rendering "bondservant" indicates that the meaning of the original Greek is stronger than our English word "servant". It means "slave". The apostle of Jesus Christ is also His slave.

The words "slave" and "slavery" have, for us, very evil associations, and they seem by common consent to have been avoided in our English versions. And yet they serve to convey truths that should not be ignored or forgotten by the faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

There is the truth, for example, of absolute ownership. As the slave belonged wholly to his master, was, in fact, his property, and could claim to possess no property of his own; so entirely do we belong to our Lord and Master. Our time, and all our particular talents are His; they are simply gifts from Him to be used in His service. Our bodies are His, to be used or to be disciplined for Him, as the occasion may demand.

There is the further truth that, as the slave could claim no pay, so our service is not rendered with any mundane thought of reward. The servant of Jesus Christ does not indeed go unrewarded. But his recompense is a fuller opportunity of service and a deeper experience of His love.

And there is the truth of absolute obedience; not under any force of compulsion but as the ready response to the Master's call; the attitude of one who gladly accepts the humblest as well as the highest work, and finds in so doing both joy and inward peace.

God's Gracious Gifts

The prophets of the Old Testament rejoiced to call themselves the "bondservants" of Jehovah; St. Paul and his fellow apostles gloried in being the "bondservants" of Jesus Christ. We who follow in their footsteps must catch their meaning, otherwise our lives may be impoverished and our service slack. 2 Peter i. 1–4.

The writer does not indicate the place of residence of those to whom he wrote and so we have no information about their exact geographical locality; but he describes them as those that **have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.**

The bond between him and them is the common possession of a **precious faith.** The adjective "precious" is not otiose or conventional. The faith is precious because it is highly esteemed and it is highly esteemed by its possessors because they find that it enriches them. The man who is enriched by faith in Jesus Christ and in the Father Whom He reveals is master of this present world and heir of that which is to come. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Faith is triumphant because by it we see that world of spiritual reality which lies around and about the world of shadows and illusions in which we live. We are in the midst of inevitable decay and ceaseless change; but we can endure "as seeing Him Who is invisible". They who "are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" can realize the preciousness of their faith in Him: "A precious faith."

> "The love of Jesus, what it is,
> None but His loved ones know."

2 Peter i. 1–4.

The prayer that the writer offers for his readers corresponds exactly with that in the opening words of 1 Peter: **Grace to you and peace be multiplied.** He has no better wish for them than that the results of faith in Christ, strengthening inspiring grace, the peace of God "which passeth all understanding" should be experienced by them in ever-increasing fulness.

Dr. Jowett has pointed out, in his own characteristic way, how the words of this greeting embody the ideals suggested by the familiar formula: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. The secret of true liberty, intellectual, moral and spiritual, is to be found in service to Christ. The secret of true equality is seen in the words "through the righteousness of God." He is absolutely fair. In His righteousness He puts us all on a basis of equality by the free gift to all who will accept it, of the precious faith. And the secret of true fraternity could not be more worthily expressed than by the conception of a company of those who are ever being enriched by the grace and peace of God through an ever-deepening knowledge of God and Christ.

The True Knowledge.

In the word **knowledge** the writer strikes a note that sounds continuously through the earlier part of the Epistle. It was probably the case at the time when he wrote that a tendency was growing in certain quarters to regard Christianity as a form of *gnosis* or knowledge and that he regarded a deep true intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ as the best corrective for this heretical tendency. Christians who were comforted by this barren intellectualism

and who might be led captive by it, would be most effectively fortified by the increasing grace and peace which came from a fuller and more intimate experience of Christ; for that is what the particular word, here used, for knowledge, seems to mean. 2 Peter i. 1–4.

The words that follow justify this emphasis on knowledge, on knowing Christ intimately by personal experience. It is through the **knowledge of Him that called us** that **His divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.** In the phrase "His divine power" the "His" probably refers to our Lord; His "divine power" is a somewhat unusual expression in Scripture. Deissmann[1] has pointed out that it occurs in a religious inscription of Asia Minor in the early Imperial period. He thinks it not impossible that the writer of 2 Peter may have seen the inscription; but even if not he suggests, that both the author of our Epistle and the writer of the inscription may be employing "the familiar forms and formulae of religious emotion". The expression has also something of a philosophical flavour and is to be found in earlier philosophical writings. As used here the divine power is the source of the divine giving. It is God as the beneficient bestower upon us of the gifts we need. And the gifts are very rich and generous, "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." "Life" is the new life of the believer in Christ; the life of the Christian in whom Christ lives; the life eternal of those who know the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent. "Godliness" means piety in its more

The Gifts of Christ.

[1] *Bible Studies*, p. 367.

2 Peter i. 1–4.

practical aspect, spiritual "life" displaying itself in conduct. The Christian's increasing knowledge will manifest itself not only in devotion but in daily demeanour and behaviour.

To such a life Christ has called us **by His own glory and virtue.** The "glory" of Christ was the glory of His revelation of the Father, the glory of which St. John speaks: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Some think that the "virtue" of Christ does not here mean His moral excellence. To assert that would have seemed unnecessary and out of place. It refers rather to His supreme energy and power. Others hold that it *does* refer to His supreme purity and holiness; that "glory" and "virtue" correspond with and repeat the "life" and "godliness" of the previous clause, and that the combination of the phrases expresses His "divine power". This latter line of interpretation is, on the whole, preferable.

In either case the words may be taken as depicting the experience of the early Christian believers. Belonging, in many cases, to the more humble and despised classes, they found life in all its most commonplace details to be illumined by a new light and inspired by a new strength. They aspired to be brave, patient, pure and tender, as they saw their Master to be, and they found themselves enabled by Him to be like Him.

The promises of Christ.

Such was their experience of the present power of Christ. But this was not all. He had also given **precious and exceeding great promises.** The word for "promises" is peculiar to 2 Peter in the New

Testament. It only comes here and in Chap. iii. 13, in which latter passage we see that it has to do with "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness". One of the prevalent errors was a sceptical attitude about the second coming of our Lord and the refutation of this error is one of the main themes of the Epistle. Here the writer hints at the matter in a preliminary way by the declaration that the gifts of Christ relate to the future as well as to the present. His promises are "precious" because they are not empty words; the present joy in them is something real and substantial; they are "exceeding great" because they tell of the perfection and completion to which our present life is leading. These promises have been given by Christ in the first instance to His Apostles, by whom they were received and kept, so that they may now be received and valued by all those who have "a like precious faith" with the Apostles. And the final purpose is that they **may become partakers of the divine nature.** 2 Peter i. 1–4.

The writer, in verse 3 has spoken of the "divine power". Here he speaks of the "divine nature". In both cases the expression has the air of belonging to Greek rather than to the usual Scriptural mode of speech. But the Greek expression is used to express a distinctly Christian truth, the truth that the believer becomes by grace a participator in the Divine Nature. St. John had said it before: "As many as received Him to them gave He the right to become children of God, *even* to them that believe on His name." And St. Paul meant the same thing when he spoke of the "fellowship of the Spirit". Older philosophers

2 Peter i. 1–4.

had said that man *is* naturally a partaker of the Divine Nature; Christian apostles and teachers said that he *becomes* a partaker by God's grace.

"Partakers of the Divine Nature."

The idea of becoming "partakers of the divine nature" opens up many extensive avenues of thought on which we can only here bestow quick glances. It does not mean simply imitating Christ; that might conceivably become a perfunctory and mechanical process. It means the indwelling of Christ. "Abide in Me," He said, "and I in you". If the abiding presence of Christ be experienced, then St. Paul's experience is realized. "I live; *and yet* no longer I, but Christ liveth in me," words that express the utmost possibility to which fellowship can attain.

To enter on this fellowship is no light matter. It means, in St. John's language, to be "born again"; in St. Paul's, to be "risen with Christ", either expression denotes change of the most radical kind. Yet, for us, being who we are, such a transition is necessary; the dominance of our ordinary human nature must be overthrown; we must put off "the old man" and put on "the new man". We must, have **escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust** before we can be "partakers of the divine nature".

If we ask what the Divine Nature, of which we may partake, distinctively is, the New Testament directs our thoughts towards an answer. God is Spirit, God is Light, and God is Love. As Spirit He reveals Himself, as Light He is diffused, as Love He gives Himself, in redemptive, sacrificial aid. The

thoughts of love and sacrifice lie very near together, and so they are joined in St. Paul's reference to "the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me". It is this life of joyful, obedient self-surrender to the Father's will that is meant by being "partakers of the divine nature". 2 Peter i. 1–4.

II

OUR CORRESPONDING OBLIGATION

"Yea, and for this very cause adding in your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in *your* virtue knowledge; and in *your* knowledge temperance; and in *your* temperance patience; and in *your* patience godliness; and in *your* godliness love of the brethren; and in *your* love of the brethren love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins."—2 PETER i. 5–9.

2 Peter i. 5–9. The Christian's Obligation.

These words suggest and emphasize a truth that should never be forgotten by the reverent and thoughtful Christian—the truth that there must be a response from our side to all that God has so richly done for us. In the preceding verses the writer has dwelt on God's gifts and promises; he now enlarges on the contribution that must be made by us. We are not merely passive recipients; we can discard or we can accept what God has done for us, we can neglect or we can thankfully appropriate. He has placed within our reach glorious possibilities; it is for us to realize them. This is made quite clear by the opening words, **adding on your part.**

The words suggest to us other New Testament monitions to the same effect. St. Paul reminded his Philippian friends of the same truth when he said: "Work out your own salvation with fear

and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you." 2 Peter i. 5–9.
St. John, after dwelling on the glorious prospect of seeing Christ, and being like Him, adds the significant words: "Everyone that hath this hope *set* on him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." The New Testament, which dwells so fully in what God has done for us, never allows us to forget our responsibility to Him.

It has been suggested—and the suggestion is not at all an improbable one—that the particular mode in which the writer here conveys his teaching is influenced by the method of the Stoic philosophers of representing progress or advance in virtue. The moral and spiritual life is viewed as a germ that gradually expands. One stage of growth leads on to another, and each onward step is made possible by the co-operation of man's will with God's will. The series of excellencies, it will be observed, begins with faith and ends with love, each intervening virtue having the place assigned to it both by the logic of the development and by the experience of the Christian life. It may be helpful to glance briefly at the writer's successive presentment of them.

In your faith supply virtue. "Faith" is here conceived as strong conviction, the belief which determines action, "the assurance of *things* hoped for, the proving of things not seen." The word "supply" has an interesting history. St. Paul is the only other New Testament writer who uses it. The sense conveyed by it, is exactly the one required here, that of rendering a service that is expected of one in virtue of one's position. "Virtue" is that

"Faith."

"Virtue."

2 Peter i. 5–9.

which is generally recognized as excellent and admirable; the excellence of man as man. Heathen philosophers had drawn noble pictures of man as he ought to be; it is the glory of the Gospel not only to depict an even nobler ideal but to indicate the source of power by which it may be attained.

"Knowledge."

By the **knowledge** which is to be added to virtue is probably meant practical skill in the details of Christian duty, spiritual discernment of the right and wrong course in any emergency that may arise. It is not the same word as that translated "knowledge" in verses 2 and 3 which, as we saw, meant full and intimate knowledge. The word used here means knowledge that is not yet ripe and complete, and so admits of further growth.

"Temperance."

And in your knowledge temperance. Temperance means continence or self-control. It adds the practical outcome of knowledge. It indicates that the Christian will not only discern between right and wrong, but will choose the right and reject the wrong; and he will do so, because by God's grace he is master of himself and not the helpless victim of his own passionate impulses.

"Patience."

To be so master of oneself is not an easy thing. The Christian will have many difficulties; he must not meet them with petulant complaint, but with patient endurance. Hence, the injunction, **and in your temperance patience.**

It will be observed that of the virtues so far enumerated, two, virtue and knowledge, are active and progressive; they are exercised in developing the powers implanted in us. Two, temperance and

patience, are rather restrictive and disciplinary. It is their function to control, and reduce to harmony our powers. 2 Peter i. 5–9.

And in your patience godliness. We have already had this word in verse 3, and saw there that it is a large and inclusive word, indicating the Christian life in its practical aspect, a life of genuine piety displayed in daily conduct. "Godliness."

The injunctions that conclude the series make it clear that these Christian virtues cannot be truly exercised in selfish seclusion or isolation. **And in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love.** St. John had already recorded it as a Divine command "that he who loveth God love his brother also". The Christian will especially love his fellow Christians as members of the same household and family; he will also love all men as those whom Christ so loved that He died on their behalf. Such love for Christ, for His followers, and for those whom He came to save, is at once the sum and the crown of the virtues that the writer has set forth. It is the final and glorious fruit into which the seed has grown. Without it the preceding graces are ineffective; they avail nothing if love be not their soul and spring. "Love of the Brethren." "Love."

For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"These things" are the seven graces just mentioned, which spring from a living faith. In the absence of any of them, the Christian character is, to that extent, deformed and runs the risk of

2 Peter i. 5–9.

presenting a picture of inconsistency. Hence, the urgency with which the cultivation of them is pressed home by the writer.

In the words we are considering he encourages his readers on various grounds to be diligent in this cultivation. In the first place he recalls the truth taught by our Lord himself when He said: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." The truth is, that, if we would know, we must do. It is only the man whose heart is set on serving Christ who is in the way to knowing him. For the knowledge here indicated is not that of doctrines about Him, but intimate and personal knowledge of His power to save, to keep and to help. And in such knowledge as this, progress can only be made by the careful cultivation of the graces that have been enumerated. And if there is to be real attainment in this knowledge these graces must not only be displayed, but they must "abound". It is when they do abound, that the Christian life is so active and fruitful, that Christ is known and realized as Saviour and as Lord.

Do, in order to Know.

For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins. These words give the second ground of encouragement to the practice of the Christian virtues, although the expression is negative in form. The Christian who is deficient in them is "blind". What the writer precisely means by "blind" he expresses by another word, one that occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The word means, literally, "closing the eyes" and appears to refer to the involuntary

and partial closing of the eyes that is characteristic of short-sighted people. The Christian to whom this applies may be called "dim sighted". He has no clear view of what he is, or how he has come to be what he is. He cannot look back to the time when he accepted Christ as his Saviour; he has "forgotten the cleansing of his old sins". He cannot look forward and see the future illumined by a radiant hope. It is because his sinful impulses are still so dominant that he has forgotten his former cleansing; he cannot see what kind of a life he whose sins have been forgiven should lead; he cannot see the world of eternal verities by which our temporal life is surrounded. He may not be wholly without light, but it is only a flickering glimmer, so that he sees "only what is near". And from this negative presentment we infer that the true Christian is one who constantly enjoys the sense of pardon that first became his, when Christ became to him a Saviour and he was baptised into His name. He is also one who, from the loftier heights of his experience, can see the land that lies beyond the river, and can catch the radiance of the heavenly city.

2 Peter i. 5–9.

III

OUR CALLING AND ELECTION TO BE MADE SURE

"Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—2 ST. PETER i. 10, 11.

2 Peter i. 10–11.

These words form the conclusion of the opening section of the Epistle, and the careful reader will mark the writer's reiteration of some of the important distinctive expressions that he has previously used. He exhorted his readers in verse 5 to add, on their part, "all diligence." Here, in view of the blessed result to which this will lead, he bids them **give the more diligence.** In verse 5 he had told them what they must "supply". Here, he tells them, what, if they do so, will **be richly supplied** to them.

God's "Calling" and "Election".

The matter to which they are to "give the more diligence" is make their **calling and election sure.** He touches, in these words, on a profound truth, which has often brought perplexity and anxiety to thoughtful Christians, the truth of God's "calling" and God's "election". The difficulty, put simply, is this. If only they are Christians whom God has chosen and called, what is the position of those who have not been so chosen? Are they helpless and hopeless?

The answer seems to be that Scripture does bear emphatic testimony to God's calling and election. He calls and elects peoples, as, for example, Israel, for the carryng out of His purpose in history. He also calls individuals, as, for example, Abraham, David and the prophets, to the particular work ordained for each. St. Paul was called because he was a " chosen vessel ". From the point of view of human thought we say that the choice precedes the call. God calls those whom he has chosen, and the choice is a matter of the inscrutable mystery of His will. 2 Peter i. 10–11.

But along with this truth, Scripture also bears testimony to another corresponding one—that of human responsibility. To be elected and called is not, in itself, the guarantee of final salvation. The election may be repudiated and the calling neglected. There must be, on our part, the response of obedience, ratifying the Divine call. St. Paul, the " chosen vessel " tells of his own strenuous efforts : " I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus." And, in the passage before us, there is, on the one hand, the affirmation that Christ has called us ; and, on the other hand, the injunction about what we must " supply ".

Scripture, in fact, puts before us the two great truths of God's election and of our freedom with its corresponding responsibility ; but how these two apparently incompatible things are to be harmonized Scripture does not say. From the point of view of human reason and human logic, we may not be able

2 Peter i. 10–11.

to see the ultimate reconcilation of God's sovereignty with our freedom; we must leave it to the Divine Wisdom and trust in the Divine Love.

It is when either of these truths is emphasized to the exclusion of the other that error arises and harm is done. A rigid insistence on the thought of election may beget a temper of pride in those who think they are of the "elect", of total despair in those who think they are rejected. On the other hand, the total elimination of any such idea would seem to reduce the universe to moral anarchy.

The thoughtful and anxious Christian, who believes that God elects and calls, may rightly dwell on the affirmation that He "willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"; and on the further affirmative that He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life". In view of words such as these, the anxious one may well take it that his own wistful searchings and aspirations are evidence that he himself is one in whose ears the living call of God is sounding, and that his true line of action is not to linger in fruitless speculations, but diligently to set about "supplying" those virtues which are our proper response to the invitation of Divine love, and so, to make his "calling and election sure."

If ye do these things ye shall never stumble. The writer does not mean, and does not say to his readers, that they shall never sin. If however, they shall acquire and practise the graces he has enumerated, they will find their path free from many stumbling-

blocks that might otherwise have hindered them; they also will have a clear vision that will enable them to see the road on which they are going. He is thinking of the onward march along the Way and of the final entry into the heavenly kingdom. 2 Peter i. 10–11.

For thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The words "richly supplied" correspond with "supply" in verse 5. If we, with loyalty "supply" the graces there enumerated, a loving and compassionate Father will more than meet the efforts of His children. He will "richly supply" that for which we have hoped and at which we have aimed, "the entrance into the eternal kingdom." We shall not receive the grudging admission for which strangers might look; we shall be welcomed as sons coming home in triumph to the Father's house.

If we wish briefly to summarize the writer's exhortation in these opening verses, it may be expressed in this way: "Be very earnest, very active in your Christian life. There are two reasons why you should; firstly, because so much has been done for you by God your Father, in Christ your Saviour; secondly, because there is in store for you such a rich reward, the entry into the eternal kingdom of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

IV

THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION

" Wherefore I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the truth which is with *you*. And I think it right, so long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me. Yea, I will give diligence that at every time ye may be able after my decease to call these things to remembrance. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we *ourselves* heard come out of heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount."—2 St. Peter i. 12–18.

2 Peter i. 12–18. "Remember."

A careful study of this passage can hardly fail to leave on the reader's mind the impression that one of its leading ideas is that of **remembrance.** It is, above all, necessary that the readers should "remember" and the writer will spare no effort to enable them to do so.

He has already told them that the "like precious faith" which they share with the apostles embraces all that conduces to life and godliness. He has also told them of the efforts towards virtue which that faith demands from them, and of the glory that awaits them. That glory is associated in the writer's

mind with the second coming of the Lord. The thought of the Return is a dominant one. We see clearly in Chapter III that a scoffing scepticism about this was beginning to spread abroad, with inevitable depravity of life as its accompaniment. The refutation of this pernicious error was one of the chief reasons for the writing of the Epistle. 2 Peter i. 12–18.

It is the writer's strong conviction of the certainty of Christ's coming again that underlies the exhortations which close this first chapter. He calls the attention of his readers to two points and bids them "remember". He will do all he can to help them to remember. The first point is the Transfiguration of our Lord, which he regards as an anticipation of His coming again in glory. The second is the message of the prophets who predicted it.

He opens his theme in words of delicate Christian courtesy. He, for his part, will be **ready always** to remind them, because their Christian welfare depends on their remembering. And yet his reminder is not addressed to men who are ignorant and disobedient. **Ye know them, and are established in the truth which is with you.**

The author, of course, is writing in the person of St. Peter, who is assumed to be speaking in advanced old age. While he is **in this tabernacle** he will continue to give them all the help he can. "Tent" would more adequately render the Greek word here used, and the comparison of the body with a tent suits the general conception of life as a pilgrimage. The pilgrim has no settled habitation; he carries such dwelling as he needs in the tent which can be erected and taken down.

2 Peter i. 12–18.

He declares that **the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly.** It is not quite clear whether the word translated "swiftly" means "soon" or "suddenly"; that is, whether the end is near at hand, or, that, when it does come, it will be a swift one. Either meaning is a possible one, and in either case, a good ground is supplied for earnestness in admonition.

Even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me. The interpretation of these words has a bearing on the authorship of the Epistle. If they are a reference to the specific language of St. John xxi. 18, then they cannot have been penned by St. Peter. It is not likely that he was alive when the last chapter of St. John's Gospel had been written and was in circulation. If, on the other hand, they do *not* refer to the passage in St. John, they may be regarded as an independent testimony to the words of our Lord narrated by St. John. Readers will interpret the words in accordance with their general view of the date and authorship of the Epistle.

"Cunningly devised fables."

St. Peter is depicted as going on to say that in what he and his fellow Apostles asserted and taught about Christ they were not following **cunningly devised fables**, but were declaring an actual fact of which they had been **eye-witnesses.** It is not quite clear what the writer meant by "cunningly devised fables" and various suggestions have been made. Perhaps the "fables" may have been analogous in character to those mentioned by St. Paul in the Pastoral Epistles, apocryphal legends originating in Jewish circles. Or, if the Epistle is rightly thought to have

been written about the middle of the second century, the reference may be to the teaching of some of the Gnostic systems. In either case the point of the assertion is that the Apostles were not dealing with fictions of the human imagination, but with historical facts when they declared **the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** The "power" is that of the risen and glorified Christ, and the "coming" is His return "to judge the quick and the dead". The former is the keyword to the second chapter of the Epistle, and the latter that to the third. 2 Peter i. 12–18.

The **majesty** of Christ, displayed at His transfiguration, of which the chosen Apostles were "eye-witnesses" is regarded as a foretaste and earnest of the glory of His second coming. **For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory.** The "honour" and "glory" refer to the words spoken by the heavenly Voice, and the "excellent glory" is a reverential paraphrase for "God", "divine power" in verse 3, and "divine nature" in verse 4 being other instances of the same kind of expression. It was by the Father Himself that the Son was addressed at the moment of His transfiguration. The Transfiguration Glory.

This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. This record of the Divine Voice seems, in the original, to correspond most closely with the record given in St. Matthew xvii. 5, omitting the words: "Hear ye Him." **And this Voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven.** The testimony here is most emphatic. "We were not the victims of any hallucination. We The Divine Voice.

2 Peter i. 12–18.

saw the Glory and we heard the Voice. And we did so on a particular occasion which we who were present can remember and in a particular place, **when we were with Him in the holy mount.**"

This expression "the holy mount" is thought by some to betray the mark of a later age, an age in which the localities of the sacred history had come to have distinctive names in virtue of the happenings connected with them. Others hold that no such inference can be drawn, and that the expression would be a perfectly natural one on the lips of a pious Jew, even before the coming of our Lord, to indicate a spot on which God had specially revealed Himself. Any such place would be regarded by him as "holy ground". This point, too, like that in verse 14 has to be considered in weighing the general question of authorship and date.

V

THE TESTIMONY OF PROPHECY

"And we have the word of prophecy *made* more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost."—2 ST. PETER i, 19–21.

2 Peter i. 19–21. "The Word of prophecy."

In these words the writer passes to the second point which he would have his readers hold in attentive remembrance, the testimony of prophecy. The general drift of the passage is fairly clear—the authority of prophecy and the respect with which it should be received. But several of the particular words and phrases are most perplexing, and have been variously interpreted by commentators.

For example, the Greek expression translated **the word of prophecy** is unique in the New Testament. It is probably a comprehensive phase referring to the whole of prophecy that has to do with the matter in hand—our Lord's second coming. But what does the writer mean by saying that we have this "prophetic word" **made more sure**? The translation of our Revisers seems to convey the meaning that the testimony afforded by prophecy is confirmed by the Voice from heaven at the transfiguration to which reference has just been made. Others interpret

2 Peter i. 19–21.

"more sure" as referring to the readers of the Epistle. They had not been present "in the holy mount" as the three chosen apostles had, and so they had not themselves heard the voice of God speaking there. But the same God had also spoken through the lips of the prophets, in words which all could read and ponder for themselves. This "prophetic word" came to them directly, and not by hearsay; hence it might well be more certain and conclusive. This way of taking the expression seems, on the whole, to give the more natural meaning.

"The shining lamp."

The writer goes on to compare this "word of prophecy" to **a lamp shining in a dark place.** Here again, the word, translated "dark" is unique in the New Testament and its meaning is not quite certain. Its primary significance seems to have been "dry" and then, by a natural transference of meaning, it came to signify "rough" or "squalid". There is evidence, too, that it came to be used for what is dark or dull in colour. The question is, which of these possible meanings is the writer here employing? If the meaning is "squalid" or "dirty" then the idea will be that the light of prophecy reveals the filth and so makes cleansing possible. If the meaning is "murky" or "dark" the idea will be that the gloom is illumined by the bright gleams of the prophetic light. The latter would seem to give a more natural and obvious meaning.

This light of prophecy is not a transient thing. It will remain to help and to cheer, **until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.** The "day" is that of our Lord's return. The writer is, not

improbably, thinking of the beautiful words in the Song of Songs ii. 17, "Until the day break and the shadows flee away"; but in addition to the departing of the shadows, he introduces the morning star, "phōsphorus" the light-bringer; the name given in ancient poetry to the planet Venus, and only used here in the whole course of the Greek Bible. When the light of this star illumines the hearts of Christian watchers they will know that the brightness of the Lord's day is approaching. 2 Peter i. 19–21.

If prophecy has so great a rôle to fulfil the right understanding of it is a matter of supreme importance. And so the readers must know **this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation.** This passage has been interpreted in various ways. Some exponents make the words refer to the prophet who uttered the prophecy, the idea apparently being that no prophet was capable of giving the full and final meaning of the prophecy he himself uttered. Had he been an ordinary man, speaking his own words, this might have been possible. But he spoke under Divine influence, and so might not know the full import of his own inspired words. So far as he knew, he was speaking on current topics to the men of his generation; but his words may have conveyed or illustrated Divine principles of action, which others in the light of history and experience, would more fully understand. In other words, the meaning attached by the prophet to his own utterances, might not be the meaning they were ultimately intended to convey. The interpretation of prophecy.

The other way of taking the words is to refer them to the reader, rather than to the prophet; to interpret

2 Peter i. 19–21.

them as saying: "You ought earnestly to study the prophets; but you must not interpret them just as you wish. There is a right way of interpreting and a wrong. If you adopt a 'private interpretation', you may be going widely astray. The Scriptures are not to be treated in that way." That the Scriptures needed to be "opened" or expounded is clearly seen in the New Testament history. Christ so "opened" them to His followers on the road to Emmaus; so did Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch. The writer does not here say who are the rightful interpreters of Scripture. He probably held that the Divine Spirit Who inspired the utterance would aid in the right interpretation of it. The matter here referred to, it will be remembered, was a burning one in the early Church. The Jews accused the Christians of perversion of the prophetic Scriptures. The Christians charged the Jews with misunderstanding them. In the dogmatic conflicts of later ages, the Bible was the battle ground, and texts were the weapons. The conflict still goes on, and it may still be of use to us to heed carefully the word of warning that "no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation".

For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost. Prophecy is not of "private interpretation" because as it was not given by the will of man, so neither can it be explained by the will of man. It is interesting to note that this is the only reference in the Epistle to the Holy Spirit, and that the particular connection in which He is mentioned is that of prophetic inspiration of which He is the source.

VI

THE COMING OF FALSE TEACHERS

CHAPTER II

" But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their lascivious doings; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you; whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not."—2 PETER ii, 1–3.

Although, in these words, we enter on a new chapter of the Epistle, there is no break in the sequence of the thought. The writer has just been enlarging on the surpassing importance of Divinely inspired prophecy, on the weight of its testimony, to the Divine Majesty of Christ. The revelation given to men through prophecy is one of God's greatest gifts to men. 2 Peter ii. 1–3.

But when this has been said there at once arises the need for a warning. Prophecy, like other gifts of God, can be perverted and misused by wicked men. It was so in the days of monarchy in Judah and Israel. **There arose false prophets also among the people.** The character of " false " prophecy in the Old Testament period is well summed up by Jeremiah (xxiii. 21, 22). " I sent not these prophets, yet they " False prophets."

2 Peter ii. 1–3.

ran : I spake not unto them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then had they caused my people to hear my words, and had turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." In other words, these prophets had no message from God, and so the effect of their utterances was to lead the people into sin.

The recollection of this, and the knowledge that a similar form of depravity had already displayed itself within the Christian Church, leads the writer to utter words of most grave and impressive warning. What is now happening in the new Israel is a repetition of what had happened in Israel of old.

He speaks, partly, in the future tense, telling of the dreadful consequences that will follow when the fruits of this false prophecy shall come to their full maturity. He speaks partly in the present tense, because the evil influence is already there, actively at work. How soon false teaching accompanied by laxity of conduct made its appearance in the Church we see in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians and in the Pastoral Epistles ; and it is on the connection between erroneous doctrine and depravity of conduct that our writer lays such emphatic stress ; **among you also there shall be false teachers** and they will work the same disaster among you by their false teaching as the false prophets wrought in Israel.

"False Teachers."

They **shall privily bring in destructive heresies.** It is questionable whether the word "privily" quite adequately represents the original here. The meaning seems rather to be that they bring in their own teaching "alongside" the established and accepted

Their harmful influence.

teaching of the Church, so that their hearers are led astray from the straight way of righteousness. The word translated "heresies" is sometimes rendered in the New Testament "sect" and sometimes "heresy". In reference both to Judaism and to Christianity, it seems to indicate divisions rather more particularly than variety of doctrines, but always divisions *within* the main body and not sects separated from it. The "false teachers" here mentioned were within the Church and members of it. The harm they did was owing to the particular nature of the heresies they taught. They were "destructive" in character and so only productive of ultimate ruin, both for themselves and for those who followed them. 2 Peter ii. 1–3.

Denying even the Master that bought them. Here we have the root and cause of the destructiveness of these heresies. They consisted in an inadequate view of our Lord, His Person, and His redemptive Work. It would seem that they had no adequate grasp of His supreme essential holiness—with its corresponding requirements for purity of life on the part of those who professed allegiance to His name. It would seem, too, that they had no true conception of human sin; they did not realize its unutterable sinfulness. And so they did not realize the cost of redemption to "the Master that bought them". When they so forgot God's holiness and their own shortcomings, the way was short and easy to the view: "There is no such thing as sin; we are free to do what we like"; the end of which is **swift destruction.**

Evil teaching will be followed, as a consequence, by

2 Peter ii. 1-3.

evil lives; and the evil combination will find many ready followers. **Many shall follow their lascivious doings; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of.** The teachers of these lax and seductive doctrines were still professors of the Christian faith, professed travellers on "the way of truth". The slackness and immorality of their lives would bring the "way" into most grievous disrepute in the eyes of an observant and considering heathen world.

And with covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you. In these words the writer boldly attacks the motives of the false teachers. Like the teachers known as "Sophists" in the ancient world, and like other wandering teachers who lectured for a livelihood, they taught for pay. And their chief consideration was the money they might be able to earn. To earn money in plenty they were ready to adapt their teaching to the desires of their hearers, using "feigned words" or, as the writer has already said, "cunningly devised fables." By so doing they made "merchandise" of them; they exploited them, using them simply as a means to the increasing of their own profits.

Their Punishment.

The fact that such teachers are able to go on and prosper in their evil ways, spreading error and corruption in the Church to which they belong, may lead some to wonder at God's apparent delay. But the delay is only in appearance. In ominous and impressive words the writer pronounces their impending doom. **Their sentence from of old lingereth not;** it has long since been ordained by God, it is

now steadily approaching, and in due time it will overwhelm them. **And their destruction slumbereth not.** The Divine sentence of destruction is not only approaching with remorseless tread, but it is wide awake and is well on the way to overtake them in their iniquitous prosperity.

2 Peter ii. 1–3.

VII

THE PUNISHMENT OF SINNERS AND THE SAVING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

" For if God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgement; and spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, having made them an example unto those that should live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* lawless deeds): the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgement; but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement, and despise dominion. Daring, selfwilled, they tremble not to rail at dignities: whereas angels, though greater in might and power, bring not a railing judgement against them before the Lord."—2 PETER ii, 4–11.

2 Peter ii. 4–11.

For illustration of the truth that God's judgement does so fall upon the wicked while His care is exercised on behalf of the righteous, the writer appeals to the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

He quotes three instances from the Book of Genesis, the Angels who sinned, the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah. St. Jude in his Epistle, in a similar context, refers to the sinful angels and to Sodom and Gomorrah; but instead of any reference to the Flood he refers to the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness.

Punishment of Sinners

From this point until the early verses of chapter iii, we are dealing with the portion of our Epistle that has so close a resemblance to that of St. Jude. It is generally held that there is a literary connection between the two writings and the question which divides commentators is, which of the two writers is using the work of the other. Is the writer of our Epistle abbreviating St. Jude, or is St. Jude expanding the words of 2 Peter ? The problem is bound up with that of the authorship ; for while it is conceivable that St. Jude might have made use of a writing of the Apostle St. Peter, it is hardly likely that St. Peter would have depended so closely on a writing by St. Jude. Consequently if 2 Peter could be shown to have made use of St. Jude, it would be a consideration unfavourable to the Petrine authorship. A very attractive case can be made for either side ; but the prevailing weight of more recent opinion is on the side of the view that St. Jude's is the older writing, and that the writer of 2 Peter has used and adapted it. The matter has been treated at greater length in the *Introduction*, and the view there preferred is followed here, that the writer of our Epistle has availed himself of the already existing Epistle of St. Jude. 2 Peter ii. 4–11.

For if God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto Judgement. What was the sin of the angels, of which mention is here made ? St. Jude, verse 6, is somewhat more explicit. He tells us that these angels " kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation ". He is probably reproducing the narrative of the Book of Enoch, The Angels who sinned.

2 Peter ii. 4–11.

which is itself an expansion of the curious narrative of Genesis vi. 1–4. Reference may be made to the note on the passage of St. Jude on p. 172 of this volume; the student will also be well advised to read chapters vi–xi of the *Book of Enoch* published by the S.P.C.K. in the *Translations of Early Documents* series. In the case of these particular words, it would certainly seem that the passage in St. Jude is the earlier, and has been followed by the writer of 2 Peter.

A rather difficult problem arises in connection with the word "pits" in the expression "pits of darkness". Here, again, St. Jude is clear and simple. He uses a Greek word which can only mean "chains" or "bonds". In the passage before us the reading in the Greek is uncertain. The R.V. translators have followed and rendered a word that means "pits" or "caverns". They mention in the margin "chains" as the rendering of a more rare and unusual word for "chains" closely resembling in form and appearance the word for "pits". The question both of reading and rendering is intricate. Here, too, on the whole it seems most likely that our writer is following St. Jude, but changes the obvious word used by him into a more out-of-the-way expression. This, of course, is on the assumption that the reading in the margin of the R.V. be followed. For the reading "pits" adopted in the text there is a curious illustration in Enoch x, where the Lord commands Raphael to "bind Azâzêl hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness; and make an opening in the desert . . . and cast him therein. And place upon

him rough and jagged rocks and cover him with darkness ". Later, however, in Enoch liv. and lvi. there is a reference to the chains in which the sinful angels were bound. So Enoch provides a source for both expressions. 2 Peter ii. 4–11.

And spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. The Deluge is the second instance mentioned by the writer of God's infliction of judgement on a sinful race. There is a hint of Divine Mercy, tempering the judgement in the description of Noah as "a preacher of righteousness". This is not explicitly stated elsewhere in Scripture, but there is abundant evidence that the view was current in Jewish tradition. It is also indirectly implied in 1 Peter iii. 20, in the reference to the " spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah ". The saving of Noah.

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, having made them an example to those that should live ungodly. The destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is the writer's third instance of Divine Judgement. There is a parallel reference in St. Jude 7, where, however, there is no allusion to the particular case of Lot. But in the reference to the whole matter the writer of 2 Peter is more rapid and vague. He only mentions Sodom and Gomorrah and he does not specify the nature of their sin. St. Jude includes " the cities round about them " and tells us that their sin was " fornication " and going " after strange Sodom and Gomorrah.

2 Peter ii. 4–11.

flesh ". The Greek word for " turn into ashes ", as well as the word in verse 4 for " to cast down to hell ", occurs nowhere else in the whole of the Greek Bible. The visible remains of these cities were a standing example to dwellers in Palestine of Divine wrath upon flagrant high-handed sin.

"Righteous Lot."

And delivered righteous Lot, sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds). The probable reason for the allusion to the case of Lot, is that, as in the case of the Flood, the writer wishes to strike a note of encouragement and hope. In the midst of the wicked world before the flood there was one man who was not only untainted by its wickedness, but protested against it, a " preacher of righteousness "; and in the catastrophe both he and his were Divinely saved. In the midst of the unutterable wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, there dwelt one who stood aloof, amazed and outraged by the surrounding iniquity. And he, too, in the end was rescued both from the abode of sin and from the punishment that overwhelmed it.

The writer, it will be observed, with threefold reiteration emphasizes the " righteousness " of Lot. The impression we gather of him from the Book of Genesis is rather that of a well-meaning, but weak man, somewhat swayed by earthly considerations. It is possible that the writer has in mind the words of the Book of Wisdom x. 6, where it is said of Wisdom that " She, when the ungodly were perishing, delivered the righteous man when escaping the fire that came

down upon Pentapolis". Lot was a striking instance of the Divine mercy, the mercy that is ever ready to snatch the brand from the burning. And it is from his case that the writer now proceeds to generalize. 2 Peter ii. 4–11.

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of Judgement. This is really the main assertion to which all the previous clauses from verse 4 onwards have been leading. What the writer wishes to make clear is that God will save the righteous, but He will also punish the ungodly. The godly man may be placed in surroundings that bring temptation, that try his fidelity and integrity, just as Noah and Lot were placed in the midst of mockers and unbelievers. Such a situation is not to be lightly sought or entered into carelessly. But if a man find himself placed in it, it may become to him a training ground and a school of faith. God can keep him in it, and, if need be, God can rescue him from it. God's Mercy and Judgement.

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement, and despise dominion. In these words the writer passes on from the sin of Sodom to speak of the libertine teachers against whom it is his main purpose to warn his readers. They, too, are carnal, they gratify defiling lusts, and they "despise dominion". It is not quite certain what this latter expression means. It may refer to our Lord. The false teachers, in effect, despised that very Lordship of Christ which was the central theme of apostolic preaching. This would be more clearly seen if the word were translated "lordship" as it might be The False Teachers and their Sins.

2 Peter ii. 4–11.

quite suitably and accurately. In the parallel passage in St. Jude 8 we have the same collocation of words as here, "dominion" . . . "dignities", with the possibility, there, too, that "dominion" (lordship) *may* refer to our Lord, or, alternatively, to a particular grade in the hierarchy of angels.

Daring, self-willed, they tremble not to rail at dignities. The "dignities" here referred to are most probably particular ranks in the angelic hierarchy. This seems to fit in with the reference to angels which immediately follows. Some, however, understand officials and leaders of the Church to be indicated by the word. But the immediately following context both here and in St. Jude 8 appears to be more concerned with powers of the spiritual world than with human dignitaries.

Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, bring not a railing judgement against them before the Lord. The "false teachers", against whom the whole weight of the writer's warning argument is directed, are both in their demeanour and in their teaching "daring" and "self-willed". They are wholly lacking in the modesty and reverence that should characterize those who think and speak of the verities of the religious life and the spiritual world. The writer contrasts their audacious conduct with what is told of the more becoming demeanour of the angels themselves.

His general reference to "angels" and a "railing judgement", taken as it stands is not very clear. But it becomes perfectly clear when read in the light of the parallel passage in St. Jude 9. We see there that

the precise reference is to the episode of the Archangel Michael, contending with the devil about the body of Moses, in which dispute the archangel did not bring a "railing judgement" against his adversary, but said "The Lord rebuke thee". This narrative is probably based on an apocryphal work, *The Assumption of Moses*, of which some further account is given in the note on St. Jude 9 on p. 177. The problem here again arises, which of the two writers is using the work of the other. To the present writer it appears far more probable that the general and rather vague passage before us is based on the perfectly clear passage in the Epistle of St. Jude. In either case, the moral to be drawn by the readers is manifest; the presumption of the "false teachers" as compared with the reverence and restraint of the higher beings of the angelic world.

2 Peter ii. 4–11.

VIII

THE WICKEDNESS OF THE FALSE TEACHERS AND ITS EVIL INFLUENCE

"But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed, suffering wrong as the hire of wrong-doing; *men* that count it pleasure to revel in the day time, spots and blemishes, revelling in their love-feasts while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; enticing unsteadfast souls; having a heart exercised in covetousness; children of cursing; forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing; but he was rebuked for his own transgression: a dumb ass spake with man's voice and stayed the madness of the prophet."—2 PETER ii. 12–16.

2 Peter ii. 12–16.

The comparison which the writer has just drawn between the demeanour of the "false teachers" and that of the angels, is the starting point for a passage of indignant invective against those who have so gravely imperilled the purity and welfare of the Church. Here and there, in the course of it, phrases occur which seem to need a word of explanation; but, for the most part, the meaning is clear and unmistakable. The burden of the charge is that the teachers are a danger to the Church both in their teaching and in their lives. Their teaching is erroneous and pernicious, based on the profoundest ignorance

Denunciation of "False Teachers".

of the matters with which they profess to deal; their lives are scandalous examples of sensual impurity, into which they lead the all-too willing weaker members of the Church. And one of the main roots of their wicked doings is avaricious greed of gain. They teach a doctrine which the natural man will gladly hear, and they set an example that he will readily follow; and they do so in order that he may pay well for it. They have prostituted their noble office for the sake of gain. In this they are worthy followers of the man who stands forth in the pages of Scripture as the one who forsook a higher calling for meaner ends, Balaam the son of Beor. 2 Peter ii. 12–16.

But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed. There is a close resemblance between these words and those of St. Jude 10, with the difference that, whereas St. Jude's words are a somewhat epigrammatic description of the false teachers, the words before us are a stern prophecy of their future destruction. The element of description in both cases is the same; the men indicated have neither the spiritual nor the intellectual power to qualify them for the office they have assumed; they are no better than the brutes that perish.

Suffering wrong as the hire of wrong-doing is not a phrase that carries its meaning on the surface. In fact, Dr. Bigg says roundly that "it is surely vain to try to get sense" out of the word translated "Suffering wrong". There is a variant reading in the Greek which has been followed by our A.V.

2 Peter ii. 12–16.

translators, who render " and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness " which gives a natural meaning and suits the context. The suggestion has been made that " suffering wrong " means that the false teachers, at death, are deprived or defrauded of the gain they hoped to enjoy. But this seems somewhat far-fetched. We must either suppose that the right reading is that of the A.V., or that the true text has been lost.

The following words paint in lurid colours the sensuality and greed of the heretical teachers with their disastrous effects upon "unsteadfast souls". The thought of their covetousness leads on to the comparison with Balaam **who loved the hire of wrong doing.** He is depicted in the Old Testament narrative as one who had the true prophetic impulse, being commissioned by God to utter the message from Him ; but who allowed the greed of gain to triumph over the prophetic impulse, to his own ultimate undoing. No comparison could better have shown both the particular sin of the " false teachers " and the doom to which it led.

" Balaam."

For Balaam stands out in the sacred record as a lamentable instance of one who knew what was right and did what was wrong. He exhibits the awful danger of trifling with conscience, of trying, as it were, to bargain with God in such a way that the profits of disobedience may be reaped, without formally disobeying Him ; of trying in fact to serve both God and mammon. He is an example of that self-deception to which we are all prone, when we try to twist what we know of God's will for us into

conformity with our own plans and aims. He is depicted as one who wrought disaster for Israel and came himself to a disastrous and dishonoured end. In his footsteps and towards his doom the "false teachers" were taking their daring self-willed way.

2 Peter ii. 12–16.

IX

THE HARM, ESPECIALLY TO THE RECENTLY CONVERTED

" These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm ; for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved. For, uttering great swelling *words* of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error ; promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption ; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage." —2 PETER ii. 17–19.

2 Peter ii. 17–19.

After the extended allusion to the sin of Balaam, the writer resumes the main track of his fiery invective against the false teachers and their harmful destructive deeds. Two points are worthy of the reader's careful attention.

The first is the general significance of his denunciation. The teaching of these heretics is both pretentious and demoralizing. It consists of **great swelling words of vanity**, an expression which conveys the ideas of exaggeration, unreality, boastfulness, and emptiness. It is completely disappointing to the expectations of those who accept it, as much so as a spring that gives no water, and a passing cloud from which no rain descends. It is demoralizing, for it finds easy victims in those **who are just escaping from them that live in error.** The tragedy and the paradox of it is seen in the fact that these teachers are proclaiming freedom, freedom of thought and freedom of life, the abolition of harassing moral restrictions, the gratification of natural desires ; and yet in so doing they are only riveting on the limbs of their followers

the fetters of a bondage in which the teachers themselves are enchained, **promising them liberty, while they themselves are bond-servants of corruption.** 2 Peter ii. 17–19.

The second point to be observed is the connection between this passage and St. Jude 12, 13. There is general resemblance, with differences in particular details, the appearance of resemblance being rather greater in the English rendering than in the Greek original. In this case, as in the others that have been mentioned, the problem for the student is to decide which writer is using the work of the other. The present writer shares the conviction of those who hold that the passage in St. Jude has the greater appearance of originality, and that the writer of our Epistle is adapting the words of it for the purpose of his own description of the evil character of the heretical and misleading teachers.

X

THE DANGER OF APOSTASY

" For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first. For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them. It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire."—2 PETER ii. 20–22.

2 Peter ii. 20–22.

These concluding words of the chapter depict in the most vigorous and unsparing terms the ruin in which the Christian convert is involved who yields to the specious allurements of the false teaching. He has only just escaped from **the defilements of the world.** The writer, here, is, of course, not thinking of the world of nature with all its glorious and wonderful revelation of God. He is thinking of the contemporary world around him, with its temptations to sensuality, and in general, to a most unspiritual materialism ; the world, as the abode of a fallen race alienated by their sins from God, and so abounding in " defilements ". From this wicked world, the convert has been rescued **through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.** And now, when he has only just, by Divine grace, been strengthened to abjure his old surroundings, and customs, he is, by the compromises and concessions of his " false "

instructors, driven straight back into them. Before he has had time to become established in Christian graces, he is led back into the practice of Gentile vices. It is not to be wondered that our author, writing as the Christian missionary and pastor, expresses his righteous anger, in terms of unrestrained abhorence. The seduction of new converts into the environment from which they have just emerged is a common enough phenomenon in all missionary work, one that must always fill the heart of the true evangelizing teacher with disappointment and cruel pain. For the case of the backslider is worse than that of the unconverted heathen ; it is more difficult, and, from the human point of view, more hopeless. **The last state is become worse with them than the first.** 2 Peter ii. 20–22.

There is something not only disappointing, but in a sense disgusting in such a relapse from a higher to a lower life, and the writer expresses this sentiment by his use of two homely proverbs. The first one is Scriptural, based on Proverbs xxvi. 11 : " As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is a fool that repeateth his folly." The second is taken from some unknown, probably Gentile, source and presents certain difficulties of interpretation. One is as to the exact force of the verb rendered " washed ". The A.V. translators regarded it as being passive and have translated it " was washed ". The R.V. translators regarded it as middle, and have translated it " had washed ". Another point is as to the possibility, in ordinary life, and in usual circumstances, of a pig either being washed or washing itself. Yet something of this kind is required by the sense of the passage

2 Peter ii. 20–22.

which speaks of a return from cleanliness to filth. It may be of course that the conditions are purely imaginary, such as might be depicted in a fable. Dr. Rendel Harris has discovered such a one, and recorded it in his *Story of Aḥikar*, "My son, thou hast behaved like the swine which went to the bath with people of quality and when he came out, saw a stinking drain and went and rolled himself in it." If this be the source of the proverb as quoted in our Epistle, the R.V. translators are shown to be right, on the point of grammar, in regarding the verb as middle voice and translating "had washed".

XI

THE MOCKING QUESTION

CHAPTER III

"This is now, beloved, the second Epistle that I write unto you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance; that ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles: knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."—2 PETER iii. 1–4.

In Chapter II the writer has spoken with the most severe condemnation of the "false teachers" and their "destructive heresies". He has charged them with doctrinal error and with laxity of life and has indicated in unsparing terms the ruinous influence of both on the thought and the life of such Christian converts as came within their sphere of influence. **2 Peter iii. 1–4.**

But in all their pernicious doctrine there was one point in particular that was peculiarly disastrous—a scoffing scepticism with reference to the Second Coming of the Lord. The questioning of this not only struck at the very root of apostolic teaching, but was bound to have a disintegrating effect on the moral life of the community, encouraging a libertine "go as you please" attitude towards life and its obligations. The question of the Lord's Return was an increasingly anxious and perplexing one for the Early Church as

2 Peter iii. 1-4.

the years continued to roll on. It would be asked by many with serious intent. To have it thrust upon them with something of cynical contempt, could not fail to be a most grievous trial to their faith.

The writer has probably had this matter in his mind from the beginning. Now, in the concluding words of his letter, he brings it out to the forefront, exhibits the weakness of the grounds on which the scepticism rests, and suggests to his readers the truer point of view and the corresponding manner of life.

This is now, beloved, the second Epistle that I write unto you. Just as in the opening greeting, and in the reference to the Transfiguration, the writer here claims, by a reference to the first Epistle, to speak through the lips and with the authority of St. Peter.

"Remember."

And, in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance. Attention has been called in the exposition of chap. i. 12-18 (p. 38) to the writer's insistence on "remembrance". An effective antidote to strange and disturbing doctrine is to recall and to dwell on the teaching that they formerly had, and the experience that has already been theirs.

In so putting the matter the writer is displaying the tactful Christian courtesy which we see so often exhibited by St. Paul. The hearer to whom reproof or warning is to be conveyed, will listen the more readily if he be told that he is not an ignorant man needing to be instructed, but a forgetful one needing to be reminded of what he already knows.

But there is more than mere courtesy in this idea of "remembrance". It touches a profounder truth; the truth that in the moral and religious life men need to be reminded of what they already know; that "progress in the Christian life is attained by bringing out into thought and practice what one already knows and believes"; that "if we would bring the exile or wanderer from faith to his true home we have not to convey him over vast intellectual tracts to some new spot, but simply to open his eyes, and let him see that he is there".[1] It is significant in this connection to remember that when our Lord promised the gift of His Holy Spirit to His followers He told them that His work would be "to bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you". And it is a fact that every revival of spiritual religion is characterized, not by the introduction of new doctrines or the formulation of a novel creed, but by the remembrance and re-affirmation of fundamental truths. It is when the Church is stirred by way of *remembrance* that she becomes conscious of renewed life and vigour. And it is when the individual "remembers", listens to an old voice, and submits to a former inspiration, that his religious life is restored and renewed. 2 Peter iii. 1–4.

What the writer wishes his readers, in this instance to remember is **the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles.** He appeals to the same witnesses as those already invoked in Chapter I, the apostles and the prophets. It is a

[1] *The Speaker's Bible.* The Second Epistle of St. Peter, p. 391.

2 Peter iii. 1–4.

debated question whether "apostles" here refers to the original Twelve, or is used in the wider, more inclusive sense, with reference to other Christian workers. If the reading "your" before "apostles" be genuine, it may signify that the reference is to the accredited missionaries through whom those addressed in the Epistle were first evangelized. There is also a question as to what is meant by "the commandment of the Lord" given through these Apostles. If we interpret it by the phrase "the holy commandment" of ii. 21, it would seem to indicate the teaching of our Lord as to the fulfilment of the moral law, as set forth, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount, and as promulgated by the Apostles. If the phrase, however, is to be understood in close relation to the matter of which the writer is speaking, the reference may be more particularly to our Lord's command that men should expect and prepare for His Return; such commandment as is recorded in St. Matt. xxiv. 36 ff., St. Mark xiii. 35-37, St. Luke xii. 40, and proclaimed by St. Paul in I. Thess. v. 2–4.

The parallel passage in St. Jude (verse 18) makes it clear that the Apostles had foretold the coming of a time when **mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts.** The readers of the Epistle were now experiencing the fulfilment of that prophecy, and there was some element of comfort for them in the fact that the adversity through which they were passing was not an undreamt-of contingency, but a thing foreseen and foretold by their first instructors.

The Mocking Question

The particular form of mockery singled out by the writer, is the jeering question about the Lord's Return, **Where is the promise of His coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.** The question had an air of scorn. "Where is the promise? What has become of it? Where are there any signs of its fulfilment?" And it struck at a most deeply cherished expectation. For there is no doubt that the Apostles and their followers interpreted what they knew of our Lord's teaching to mean that within their generation He would return, from the Heaven to which He had ascended, to reign over a renovated world. As the members of that generation passed away, and there was no such realization of its hope as the Church had confidently expected, the hope faded into doubt, and, in many cases, into complete despair. To the question "where is the promise of His coming?" there seemed to be no ready answer. The contention of the scoffers was that the world's history proceeded in a placid uniform way. Nothing of a catastrophic nature had happened; nothing of the kind was likely to happen. "From the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." "The fathers" is a vague phrase, and may mean the original ancestors of the race; in which case the assertion is that from the beginnings of human history there has been no evidence of any such dramatic Divine intervention in the affairs of mankind. Or, it may mean the

2 Peter iii. 1–4.

"Where is the promise."

2 Peter iii. 1–4. fathers and founders of the Christian Church who had looked for the coming in their own lifetime, and so would seem to have been disappointed of their hope. Was the hope, then, a baseless one? What answer was to be made to the railing question?

XII

THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

"For this they wilfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men."—2 PETER iii. 5–7.

2 Peter iii. 5–7.

The Writer's Answer.

The writer suggests for the comfort and strengthening of his readers, a threefold line of answer. The first, contained in the above words, is this; that the critics have not rightly read the history of the world. It is not true to say that all things have continued as they were from the beginning. In order to put their mocking question with effect, the scoffers have deliberately ignored the narrative of primaeval human history in the Book of Genesis. The writer interprets the record of creation there, as indicating that the earth was made "out of water" and "through" water; possibly meaning that it was made from the surrounding sea and that the life on it was supported by the rain from above; in other words that water was at once the material and the instrumental cause of the subsistence of the earth. So the earth was constructed by the Divine fiat, **by the word of God.**

2 Peter iii. 5–7.

(1) The Early World Destroyed by Water.

But the record tells us that when "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth" the very element that served for the construction of the world was used for its destruction. **By which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.** God *did* intervene in the world that He had created, so effectively that the ante-diluvian world may be said to have perished, and a new world to have arisen out of its destruction. The completeness of this destruction and its swift descent upon a world that seemed to present every appearance of uniform continuity are the points of emphasis in our Lord's reference to the Flood (St. Matt. xxiv. 38). "For as in those days which were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered, into the ark, and they knew not until the Flood came and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of Man."

If the ancient narrative of Genesis is to be accepted, then it simply is not true to say that God has left His world to go on, unvisited and unchecked. The Flood was an instance and a symbol of His recreative power. And the writer argues that what he has done once He may do yet again. **The heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men.** The Divine Covenant, associated with the rainbow, was held, by Jewish interpreters, to signify that the earth should never again be destroyed by water. "The waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." On the

The Present World shall be destroyed by Fire.

other hand there were passages in the other Old Testament writings, in which fire is spoken of as attending the final judgement; such as Psalm xcvii. 3: "A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His adversaries round about"; and Isaiah lxvi. 15, 16: "For behold the Lord will come with fire and His chariots shall be like the whirlwind. . . . For by fire will the Lord plead." Stoic philosophers, too, taught that the earth is "stored with fire" which will one day burst forth and consume everything. So there were more possible sources than one for the view which the writer here enunciates—that the future destruction of the world will be by fire. This he declares to be in harmony with **the same word** that decreed the former creation from water and destruction by water; and, in the future as in the past, the catastrophe will be no mechanical happening in the physical order; it will belong to the moral order, being concerned with "the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men".

2 Peter iii. 5–7.

XIII

THE COMPASSIONATE DELAY OF GOD

" But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness ; but He is long suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."—2 PETER iii. 8–9.

2 Peter iii. 8–9.

These words contain the second and third line of answer suggested by the writer. One may be said to emphasize the God-ward, the other, the man-ward aspect of the matter. The affectionate warmth of his address seems to betray his deep sympathy with the perplexity and anxiety under which they laboured.

(2) God is not limited by time.

He reminds them that **one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.** He is not actually quoting, though he may have in his mind the Psalmist's words: "For a thousand years in Thy sight Are but as yesterday when it is passed." The purport of the words, however, in his lips is somewhat different. The Psalmist is contrasting God's eternity with the short span of our human life. Our writer is contrasting God's eternity with the impatience of human expectations. Our mortal lives belong to the temporal order, and we inevitably reckon and estimate by the lapse of time. But God is eternal, and the eternity which is His, is unmarked

by the time divisions of the temporal order. The eternal order is not only higher than, but other than, that of time. Our outlook is so limited that it may easily seem to us that an event which has been delayed for centuries will never happen at all. But to God such long or short periods of time have not the limiting significance they have to us. Expectation and prolonged delay may worry us and go far to break our hearts. And into our anxieties He may lovingly enter, for "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust". But to Him, as Eternal Spirit, these time divisions of years and centuries are insignificant. And the anxious Christian who frets because his Lord does not return with glory in the clouds of heaven, must bear this thought in mind, that our time measurements are not to be applied to the operations of the Eternal. He works in His own way, seeming, to us, sometimes, to take a thousand years to do the work of a day, and again, to do in a day, what appears to be the work of a thousand years. By our standard of reckoning His deeds, both in nature and in history, seem now to be incredibly swift, now most wonderfully slow. But we have not yet the standpoint from which to estimate His doings; it is our wisdom to trust Him and await the revelation of this purpose.

2 Peter iii. 8–9.

But, if the Godward side is, to us, inscrutable, we can understand, and, if we are wise, act on, the results for us of this apparent delay of return to judgement. The delay, if rightly interpreted, is no indication of Divine heedlessness. **The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness.**

2 Peter iii. 8–9. (3) His seeming delay is merciful.

Such a conception of His relation to us is irreverent and utterly unworthy. It is rather to be interpreted as dictated by merciful compassion. **He is long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.** What seems to be delay is really increased opportunity for salvation. The longer the coming is postponed, the more time is God giving for the working-out of His redeeming purpose through the preaching of the Gospel. For He "willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth". Commentators repeatedly quote, in this connection, the beautiful saying of Augustine that God is *patiens quia aeternus*—long suffering because He is eternal. As Dr. Plummer puts it: "He Who is from everlasting to everlasting can afford to wait." The writer would have his readers realize that it is not because God has forgotten them, but because He loves them that the judgement is delayed.

XIV

THE FINAL CONFLAGRATION OF THE WORLD

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in *all* holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? But, according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—2 PETER iii. 10–13.

2 Peter iii. 10–13. The Unexpected Coming.

The conception that dominates these words is that of the destruction of the world by fire, on the day of the Lord's return. The coming of that day will be unexpected, **as a thief**. The very essence of this picturesque comparison is the idea of unawareness. The one object of a thief is to come when no one is looking for him, is even dreaming of the possibility of theft. The expression is an echo of our Lord's words recorded in St. Matthew xxiv. 43, and almost an exact quotation of St. Paul's warning in I Thessalonians v. 2, "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." No figure could convey better the need for unceasing vigilance and preparation.

The Final Conflagration.

The writer's description of the final conflagration is vivid and terrifying, in part depending on the language of the Old Testament. The expression

2 Peter iii. 10–13.

with a great voice may refer to the roaring of the flames, or it may refer to the rolling of the heavens together as a scroll, depicted in Isaiah xxxiv. 4. It is peculiar to this passage in the Greek Bible. There is much debate about the meaning of the word **elements** of which it is said that they **shall be dissolved with fervent heat**. The margin of the R.V. supplies the interpretation on which there is fairly general agreement "heavenly bodies"; meaning the sun, moon and stars. Dr. Bigg remarks that the Rabbis quoted Isaiah xxxiv. 4 to show that the stars will perish at the end of the world, and it seems most natural to suppose that the writer is here expressing the same view.

"Be ye ready."

He interrupts his description at this point to draw and dwell on the moral of preparedness. The mind of man, he seems to say, can picture nothing more awful than to be caught unready and unprepared by such a Divine visitation as this. On the other hand, the devout and upright believer will not shrink in dismay, but will anticipate it with trustful confidence; for it only means the passing of the old world, the scene of probation and trial, to give place to a new world of more perfect service and communion.

In all devout meditation about the Second Coming, and in all reverent speculation about its nature, this is the ultimate question: **What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness?** The point of the question is made still more clear by contrast with the preceding clause. That speaks of **things** which **are all to be dissolved**; this speaks of "persons". It is the material fabric of the universe

that will be "dissolved"; "persons," the writer implies, are not subject to this dissolution. The day of God may be, for them, the day of entrance into fuller life; as "persons" they belong to the eternal order, capable of eternal bliss, or of eternal loss, "What manner of persons ought ye to be?" 2 Peter iii. 10–13.

But, according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The "promise" referred to in these familiar and beautiful words, is probably that of Isaiah lxv. 17: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind"; the fulfilment of which was seen by the seer of the Apocalypse: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away." (xxi. 1.) The further description, **wherein dwelleth righteousness** may be the writer's own, though an interesting parallel is to be found in the **Book of Enoch** (xlvi. 3) speaking of "the Son of Man, Who hath righteousness, with Whom dwelleth righteousness". The righteousness of which the "new heavens and new earth" are the permanent abode is the true inspiration to "all holy living and godliness" in this present world.

> Yet still the light of righteousness beams pure,
> Beams to me from the world of far-off day:—
> Lord, Who hast called them happy that endure,
> Lord, make me such as they.[1]

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

XV

THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPECTATION AND HIS DUTY

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in His sight. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you as also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, knowing *these things* beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* the glory both now and for ever. Amen."—2 PETER iii. 14–18.

2 Peter iii. 14–18.

The opening words of this concluding section are a renewed appeal for strenuous moral effort on the part of those to whom the epistle is sent, in view of what has been said about Christ's return to judgement. The writer entreats them to **give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in His sight.** The proper attitude for the man who expects the Return is neither one of idle anticipation, nor of feverish dread, but of happy confident preparation. The expression "found . . . in His sight" implies not only investigation and discovery, but also that the investigator is Christ, Who will utter the words of admission to the "new heavens and

new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness". In order that they may be in a position to hear this blessed welcome, Christians must give diligence to be found **in peace.** The peace referred to is not so much that of quietude and stillness, but rather that of harmony, without any discord. It is the co-operation, without any friction, without any disturbing hindrance, between man's will and the will of God, a co-operation embracing body, mind and spirit. He who so dwells in, and is possessed by the peace of God, will be **without spot.** Under the old covenant the worshipper was taught that the offering which he brought to God must be whole and sound, neither tainted by disease nor any other defect. The Christian's whole-hearted consecration of all his powers to the service of his Lord, must similarly be free from any spot of selfish taint. And such a one, who through the power of Christ is found "in peace, without spot" will also be found **blameless.** He may stand, without fear, before the Judgement Seat, for "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus".

2 Peter iii. 14–18.

And account that the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation. The writer in these words reaffirms what he has already said in verse 9. Instead of criticizing the apparent delay in the Lord's return and describing it as "slackness", the better way is to regard it as a graciously bestowed opportunity for repentance, and for working out salvation with the aid of God Who worketh in us.

Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also

2 Peter iii. 14–18.

in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things. The allusion, in these words, to St. Paul is full of interest, and full, also, of tantalizing uncertainty. The terms in which the reference is made are so vague and general. Is the writer speaking of any one of St. Paul's extant epistles, included in the New Testament canon? And what topic, in particular, is indicated by **these things**? If we could be sure about the latter question, we should be better able to answer the former one. If, for example, "these things" refer more particularly to the immediately preceding words "the long suffering of the Lord is salvation", then, our thoughts would naturally turn to the Epistle to the Romans in which the ideas of God's long suffering and its gracious purpose are especially prominent. If, however, the expression refers to laxity of life arising out of scepticism about the Return, we should think of the first Epistle to the Corinthians and those to the Thessalonians, since both in Corinth and Thessalonica similar situations seem to have arisen. If, again, the expression "these things" refers to points of difficulty connected with the Second Advent, St. Paul treats particularly of these in II Thessalonians. It is impossible to say, with any degree of certainty, to which of the Pauline letters the writer is making reference. Taking the passage as it stands, and regarding the words "even as" as closely connecting it with the words that go before, a reference to the Epistle to the Romans seems perhaps more probable than any other. The interspersed words **as also in all his Epistles,** would certainly appear to indicate a reference to some

teaching that was generally characteristic of St. Paul, and the aim of the writer, in making the reference, was probably to disabuse the minds of his readers of any idea that Pauline and Petrine teaching were at variance on this subject of the true Christian attitude towards the Return of the Lord. 2 Peter iii. 14–18.

Wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. St. Paul's Epistles. The careful student, in reading these words, finds himself confronted by three interesting questions.

(1) Do the words imply that the time had now come when the Canon of the New Testament writings was well on the way towards formation? (2) What were the "things hard to be understood" in the Pauline letters? (3) What is meant by the expression "the other Scriptures"?

The answer to the first of these questions is "No". It is quite probable that, at a very early stage, the churches would make their separate collections of Apostolic letters, that there would be interchange of these letters between Churches, and so, that an Apostolic letter might be known over a fairly wide area not long after it was written. This might well be almost within the life-time of the Apostles, and so the above words do not, taken by themselves, demand a later date for our Epistle, though, of course, they are quite consistent with it. With regard to the second question, about the "things hard to be understood" the problem is whether the writer is thinking of particular difficulties about our Lord's Return, or, is speaking with a more general reference.

2 Peter iii. 14–18.

In the former case, he may be thinking of such a passage as 2 Thessalonians ii, a chapter which presents many difficult problems. In the latter case, of a wider reference, he may be thinking of St. Paul's great main doctrine of God's free grace, with, what might seem to some, its apparent disparagement of the Law. This has always been a doctrine "hard to be understood" by the plain matter-of-fact man of somewhat legalistic temperament; and it has always been open to perversion in the direction of antinomian excess, or, as the writer puts it, of being wrested by "ignorant and unstedfast" men "unto their own destruction". It has only been when the Church, throughout her history, has risen to the higher levels of her experience that she has really grasped this fundamental doctrine; and it is true to say generally that every revival of spiritual religion has been a return to an apprehension of this Pauline teaching. Doubtless it was this that held a prominent place among the "things hard to be understood" for it may in part, at any rate, have been a perversion of it that was causing the troubles with which the writer is concerned.

The third question is one to which no certain answer can be given. The "other Scriptures" *may* refer to other apostolic writings. But the most probable reference is to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and the natural inference is that the words were penned by a writer who classed St. Paul's Epistles as authoritative writings with the Old Testament, on the ground, presumably that they were read in the churches along with the lessons from the Old Testament. In that case, although, as we

have seen, the opening words of the paragraph did not, in themselves, require a later date for our Epistle, this putting of the Pauline Epistles in the same category with "the other Scriptures" would certainly seem to do so. 2 Peter iii. 14–18.

Seeing that there is such abundance of teaching, including not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also the Pauline writings, the readers will do well to pay most careful heed to it, lest, says the writer, **ye fall from your own stedfastness.** The word translated "stedfastness" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Some prefer to render it "foundation" referring it rather to the strong foundation on which the Christian life can be firmly built. That foundation is belief in Christ's coming, and the hope of entering into His kingdom. With this foundation surely laid, the edifice of consistent Christian life can be securely reared, or, to change the figure, there can be development and growth, such growth as is the object of the last injunction. **Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.** The grace is that of which He is the Giver; the knowledge is the personal communion with Him that readily appropriates His gracious gifts, a knowledge, which the humble believer may acquire, and in which he may be increasingly enriched. The Last Warning. The Last Injunction.

To Him be the glory both now and for ever. In the words of this doxology homage is paid to Christ as God. They complete the impression which is clearly made by the language of the whole Epistle, of the writer's unhesitating conviction of our Lord's divinity. The expression translated **for ever** is Doxology.

2 Peter iii. 14–18.

a unique one in the New Testament. Its literal rendering is given in the R.V. margin "unto the day of eternity". It means the day of God which marks the end of time and the beginning of eternity, or rather which is itself eternity, the endless day which shall never pass away.

THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF ST JOHN

INTRODUCTION

To discuss exhaustively the question of the authorship of these Epistles would be to open up the whole question of the Johannine literature; an undertaking important enough in itself, but not lying within the scope of the commentaries in this series. It may, however, be of interest to the reader if we recall briefly one or two of the main factors in this rather intricate problem and indicate the position at which the discussion seems to have arrived.

The traditional view is that the Fourth Gospel, the three Epistles assigned by their titles to "John", and the Apocalypse are all the work of St. John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, who refers to himself, indirectly, as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" in the Gospel, as "the elder" in the second and third Epistles, and simply by his name "John" in the Apocalypse. At a very early stage in the history of the Church this comprehensive assignment was called in question. Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, about the middle of the third century A.D. was so struck by the marked difference in style between the Gospel and the Apocalypse that he declared that they could not be by the same author. He accepted the Gospel as the work of St. John the Apostle, and so was driven to assign the Apocalypse to some other John. In support of his view he mentioned the fact that there were two monuments or tombs in Ephesus

with the name of John. This argument from the difference of style has had great weight with many scholars, and, on the ground of it, while attributing the Gospel and the Epistles to the son of Zebedee, they have assigned the Apocalypse to a contemporary John at Ephesus, supposed to be mentioned by the very early writer Papias. We may say "supposed to be mentioned", because it is a debated point between scholars, whether Papias, in the passage referred to, is alluding to two Johns or only to one, the Apostle.

This same Papias, who was Bishop of Hierapolis, in the first half of the second century A.D., is credited with another statement that has served greatly to complicate this problem of the Johannine writings. Reference is made to him by a mediaeval writer of the ninth century, Georgios Hamartolus; there is also a reference made in an Epitome that seems to be based on the Chronicle of Philip of Side belonging to the fifth century. In both these writings Papias is quoted as saying that John the Apostle was martyred by the Jews. The latter of the two writings is more particularly explicit: "Papias says in his second book that John the Divine and his brother James were slain by the Jews." The bearing of this statement on the Johannine problem is obvious. If the statement is true; and if it means that St. John was executed at the same time as his brother St. James (Acts xii. 2), or even later, then the Apostle St. John could not have written any of the works traditionally ascribed to him. He was cut off in the early years of the Church's life.

There are many reasons for viewing this statement attributed to Papias with very grave suspicion. If St. John was killed at the same time as his brother, St. James, it is curious that no mention is made of the fact in Acts. It is curious too, that the historian Eusebius, who knew the writings of Papias, and quotes copiously from them, should make no allusion to this passage. Over against it stands the early and widely held belief that John the Apostle lived to old age at Ephesus, and wrote his Gospel there.

This alleged statement of Papias is a point of critical significance. If it is true, it cuts out the very possibility that the Apostle St. John could have written the whole or any part of the Johannine literature. If it is not true, then we are free to weigh the various points of external and internal evidence on which the belief rests that St. John the Apostle spent the evening of his days at Ephesus, was exiled to the island of Patmos, and wrote the Gospel, the three Epistles, and the Apocalypse.

There are, indeed, other subdivisions of opinion. Some who maintain the traditional view that the son of Zebedee lived to old age in Asia Minor and wrote the Fourth Gospel, decline to attribute to him the Apocalypse. Others, taking the same general attitude, reverse the details; they assign the Apocalypse to the Apostle, and attribute the Gospel to some other writer. In these debates the somewhat elusive and shadowy figure of John "the elder" plays a part, and he receives, in either case, the particular authorship that is denied to the Apostle. As we have already said, some of the most competent modern scholarship

has questioned the very existence of "John the Elder", and has maintained that the "Elder" was no other than the Apostle, who in his advanced and revered old age was designated amongst other elders as "the elder" in particular.

When we come to consider more particularly the history of the two Epistles with which we are immediately concerned, we find them to belong to the class of those writings which did not win immediate and unquestioned acceptance in the canon of New Testament writings. The historian Eusebius reckons them among the "controverted" books, in the same rank as St. James, St. Jude, and 2 Peter, "well known and recognized by most". About a hundred years before Eusebius, the great Alexandrine teacher, Origen, had remarked that "not all consider them genuine", though he himself assigns them to St. John with a "perhaps".

What was the reason for this early hesitation about these Epistles? It may have been partly on the ground of their brevity and their comparatively limited scope. One of them is certainly a personal letter; the other is either personal or is addressed to a local community. As Origen said: "Together they do not contain a hundred lines." Then there may at a very early stage have been some uncertainty about the authorship of them. Neither Epistle claims actually to be written by "John". In both cases the salutation is from "the Elder". Those who had read the works of Papias and interpreted his reference to "the Elder John" as meaning another person than the Apostle, *may* have been inclined to assign

the two Epistles to him rather than to the Apostle, although so far as our extant information goes the specific assignment is first mentioned by Jerome.[1]

Over against these considerations we find that from the early days of the third century, they are quoted as being St. John's and they are included in the Old Latin Version.

When we take into consideration the internal evidence supplied by the contents of the Epistles, we find nothing in them inconsistent with the view that they were written by the Apostle St. John. The description of himself as "the Elder" in the salutation is certainly not inconsistent. If the Apostle lived to old age at Ephesus and exercised a general supervision over the churches in that region, he may very well have come to be known with a sort of affectionate distinction as "the Elder". That an Apostle might describe himself by this title is indicated by St. Peter's words: "The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder" (1 Peter v. 1). The general style and diction of the Epistles present no difficulties; indeed, as the late Professor Moulton vigorously asserts, "no one with the faintest instinct of style" would detach the Johannine Epistles from the Fourth Gospel. The Second has the closest resemblance to 1 John both in language and thought, and the third is closely related to the second. Anyone who has seen reason to assign the Fourth Gospel and 1 John to the Apostle St. John need have no difficulty in also assigning these two Epistles to his pen.

The Second Epistle presents us with one of the most

[1] *De Vir. Ill.* c. 18.

difficult of the minor problems of New Testament criticism. To whom was it sent ? To an individual or to a church ? The matter may be put this way. If you dwell upon the opening and the closing words of the Epistle you would naturally infer that it was sent to an individual. If you dwell upon the intervening words which form the central portion of the Epistle, you would, with equal naturalness, infer that it was intended for the members of a church. Which impression should be allowed to prevail over the other ?

It is very interesting in following this discussion not only to see how the facts strike different commentators, but also to mark the different ways in which they respectively pronounce upon them. Some find the facts so perplexing that they speak with caution, and hesitate to pronounce an absolute decision. Others are troubled by no doubts at all, but speak with very clearly cut emphasis.

If we confine ourselves to those expositors most familiar to English-speaking students, we see these differences clearly displayed. Bishop Westcott, for example, speaks with characteristic caution. " On the whole," he says, " it is best to recognize that the problem of the address is insoluble with our present knowledge." But, after this proviso, he permits himself to indicate his personal opinion. " The general tenour of the letter favours the opinion that it was sent to a community and not to one believer." Dr. Plummer is as cautious as Bishop Westcott. He prefers " to leave open the question, which cannot be determined whether the letter is addressed to an

individual or to a community". But he claims that "probability is largely in favour of the former hypothesis".

These two eminent commentators both decline to pronounce an absolute verdict, and in this they are at one. In opinion, however, they clearly differ. Professor Peake, in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, supports the view that the letter is addressed to a Church. So also does the late Dr. Adeney, in the *Biblical Introduction* with which his name is associated. Dr. Moffatt, in his *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, is one of those whose opinion is clear-cut and emphatic. "That 'the elect lady' denotes a church is," he says, "clear, in spite of recent arguments to the contrary." Dr. David Smith, in the *Expositor's Greek Testament* is equally clear and emphatic on the other side. "It is therefore," he says, "not a church, but a lady that is addressed." One of the most recent writers, Professor Humphries, in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, supports the view that the letter is sent to a church.

It is obvious in these circumstances that we must either be content to leave the matter undecided, or while maintaining an attitude of cautious reserve, to form an opinion based on our own careful reading of the Epistle. To the present writer it seems that the balance of probability lies on the side of the view that the Epistle is written to a church, and this mainly on the ground of its general contents. It is true that the third Epistle is certainly addressed to an individual, and that the *prima facie* view of the

opening words of the second one might seem to favour an individual reference: "Unto the elect lady." But verses 6 to 12 seem more naturally to be addressed to a community than to members of a family. If it be replied that verses 1 to 5 seem, with equal clearness to be addressed to a lady and her children, and that verse 13 is obviously addressed to an individual, we may point to the fact that it was apparently an accepted custom of the age to speak of a church as an individual. St. Peter says: "She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you," in which passage the reference seems most probably to be to the Church. The passage in St. Peter, it is true, presents the same problem as the one before us, for it may be debated whether "she" refers to a church or an individual. One important group of authorities solves the problem by reading "the Church" instead of "she", in which case the meaning is clear. If St. Peter's words be regarded as too ambiguous to afford any certain support we may still remember that each of the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse is personified in its "angel" to whom, in each case, the Seer is commanded to write.

It is possible that this way of speaking may rest ultimately on the conception of the church as the bride of Christ. St. Paul (2 Cor. xi. 2) can say: "I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ," where, apparently, the figure can be applied to a local church. In the well-known passage Ephesians v. 22–33, Christ's relation to the Church is compared at length to that of a husband to his wife. In the *Shepherd* of Hermas,

written early in the second century, the Church appears to the prophet as a woman and is addressed by him as "Lady". It may, therefore, on the whole, have been a well-understood form of address towards the end of the first century.

If an individual lady and her children are meant, it seems somewhat hyperbolical to say (verse 1) that they are loved by all that know the truth. Also the phrase, "the children of thine elect sister salute thee", seems stilted if the greeting is from children to their aunt. And why is the mother of the children left out? The words seems more natural if the reference is to a church and its members. Possibly the reference is to the members of the Ephesian Church, where presumably the "Elder" was writing, and the "elect lady" to whom the greeting was sent may have been one of the churches of Asia, perhaps Pergamum, as the late Dr. Findlay has suggested.

The third Epistle is certainly addressed to an individual, Gaius. It is a letter of commendation such as those referred to by St. Paul in 2 Cor. iii. 1, the sending of which was common in Apostolic and later times. It is intended to introduce to Gaius a visiting Christian named Demetrius. In the course of the letter the writer has occasion to speak with severity about the hostile and truculent behaviour of a certain prominent member of the Church, named Diotrephes.

There is such a close resemblance to the second Epistle that one may reasonably assume that they not only proceed from the pen of the same writer, but

were written about the same time. It may even be that they were written to the same Church, and that the words in verse 9: "I wrote somewhat unto the Church" are a reference to the second Epistle.

The third Epistle clearly reveals an atmosphere of controversy. What the precise nature of this was we can only conjecture. Was it simply personal? Was it ecclesiastical or doctrinal, or did all these elements play a part in it? Harnack has suggested that in Diotrephes we have the first monarchial bishop upholding the autonomy of a local church.[1] He certainly took a very vigorous line of opposition to any influence from the side of the "Elder". There is also the possibility that the opposition may have been on doctrinal grounds; but, in that case, we should rather think that the "Elder" would have used different words. The behaviour of Diotrephes seems to have been insubordination and revolt prompted by strong personal hostility.

The two letters together throw an interesting light on the conditions of Church life in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century A.D. St. Paul, in his time, had known what it was to deal with insolent and factious opposition. It would appear that the aged Apostle St. John had similar burdens to bear. The contents of these letters seem to show that, though he was the Apostle of love, he could both speak and act

[1] Canon Streeter (holding that the Fourth Gospel was the work of John the Elder) suggests that Diotrephes, the local Bishop, regarded with aversion the Johannine theology, as being dangerously akin to Gnosticism, and so excluded the representatives of the Elder. (THE FOUR GOSPELS, p. 471.)

vigorously, when dealing either with false doctrine or with insubordination in conduct.

Incidentally, we have a glimpse of the independence of the Christian communities at this period. Diotrephes can for a time successfully maintain his revolt against the authority of the Apostle.

Finally, as Bishop Westcott points out, we realize the growth of the Church. Pre-eminence in a local branch of it could be the object of unworthy ambition. The two Epistles present a picture that should be recalled if ever we are inclined unduly to idealize the life of the earliest Church.

NOTE. I am keenly aware of the unsolved problems that still attend the question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel and of the three Epistles assigned to St. John. Some regard John "the Elder" as the beloved disciple and as the author of these writings. I feel, however, that there is still so much to be said for the traditional view as to the authorship that I have retained it in the text (see p. 105).

The Second Epistle of St John

"The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all they that know the truth; for the truth's sake which abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever: Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love."—2 John, 1-3.

These words are the opening salutation of the letter. They are followed by the main body (verses 4 to 11) consisting of counsel and warning, after which comes the brief concluding greeting (verses 12, 13). 2 John 1-3.

Attention has already been called in other volumes of this series to the fact that our New Testament Epistles, with few exceptions, conform to the contemporary method of letter writing. It was usual to mention, in the opening words of a letter, the sender, the recipient or recipients, and then to extend a greeting from the writer to his readers. The whole might be in the briefest possible form, as in the opening words of St. James; or it might be extended to considerable length, as in the opening of the Epistle to the Romans. The salutation here before us exemplifies the practice.

The elder unto the elect lady and her children. We have already spoken in the introduction about the problems to which these words give rise, and it may suffice here to interpret them in harmony with the conclusions at which we, there, arrived. "The Elder" we assume to be the aged Apostle St. John, The Salutation.

2 John 1–3.

"The Elect Lady."

residing, probably, at Ephesus, and exercising a general supervision over the Christian communities in the adjacent region. "The elect lady," we have seen reason to think, refers to a local Christian church. For those who think that the reference is to an individual, the problem is whether the words are, as the English A.V. and R.V. take them, a general description, or whether either one of the two Greek words employed is a proper name; that is whether the greeting is to "the elect Kyria" or to "the lady Electa". Of these alternatives, it may be said of the former that if St. John had intended to say this the Greek words would have been in a different order. We come, however, probably most nearly to the actual facts of the case if we acquiesce in the conclusion that the greeting is not to an individual lady but to a personified Church. On this supposition "her children" will indicate the members of the Church addressed.

Whom I love in truth. There seems to be a marked emphasis on "I" in the Greek of this passage, and there is, possibly, something in the suggestion that a situation of dispute and controversy lies behind the words; others, not mentioned by name, were not so affectionate, but the Elder declares with emphasis his strong regard. He, for his part, loves the members of this Church, and he does so "in truth"; that is he does so in the most absolute Christian sincerity; his love is a love that in every respect is deserving of the name, manifesting itself in thought, feeling, speech, and intercourse. There is nothing in it merely nominal, no faintest tinge of hollow hypocrisy.

And not I only, but also all they that know the truth: These words seem to find their most appropriate setting if the Elder is writing to a Church in which he can confidently reckon on faithful support, though he is aware of divisions in it, and conscious that there is some opposition to himself and his teaching. He loves "the lady" and her "children" himself "in truth". Others, too, just in proportion as they have come to know the truth, love them also. By the "truth" here the Elder means the truth, as it is revealed in all its living fulness in Jesus Christ and unfolded by His Spirit. The word recalls the saying of our Lord: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." In fact, if throughout this passage we were to substitute the word "Christ" for the word "truth" we should be getting a little more nearly to the heart of the writer's meaning. 2 John 1–3.

For the truth's sake which abideth in us, and it shall be with us forever. The common possession and acknowledgement of the Truth—of Jesus Christ Who is the Truth—is the only certain foundation of love. The elder loves those to whom he writes, not because of their special attractiveness of character or charm of demeanour, but on the ground of the Truth that abides in him and them alike. This emphatic reiteration of the word "truth" is quite in St. John's style and the thought of "abiding" is richly illustrated in our Lord's discourse in the Upper Room. The words, too, "it shall be with us forever" seem to contain a reminiscence of the words: "He shall give you another Comforter that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth." The The Abiding Truth.

2 John 1–3. construction of the Greek rather implies that this clause is an afterthought, which comes into the Elder's mind as he is speaking, and which he utters with emphasis.

The truth to which he refers is just Jesus Christ. The absolute truth of God has been manifested in a personal life. For that reason the Elder does not say that it shall be "in us", but "*with* us". If we wish to have "in" our hearts and minds the truth of God it is in so far as He Who is the truth is "with us" in the closest intimacy of personal intercourse, that our wish will be realized. The Elder speaks from the experience of a living faith. There is a note of triumphant assurance in his words. He dwells on the thought—and we may take it from him as a message of enduring and sustaining comfort—that, in the midst of "all the changes and chances" of this mortal life, and on into eternity, Christ, Who is the Truth, will not fail us, but "shall be with us for ever".

"Jesus, we steadfastly believe,
The grace Thou dost this moment give
Thou wilt the next bestow,
Wilt keep us every moment here,
And show Thyself the Finisher,
And never let us go." [1]

Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

There is here a significant and interesting variation on the usual practice. It is customary, in a salutation to *invoke* the Divine blessing in the form of grace and peace, or, as here, grace, mercy, and peace, on those

[1] C. Wesley.

addressed. But the Elder has just made a strong assertion, that the truth "shall be with us for ever", and he is still in the mood of strong assertion. He does not, therefore, invoke on his readers grace, mercy, and peace. He declares, in tones of ringing conviction that they "shall be with us". His feeling of joyous confidence breaks through the usual epistolary form; he can only express it in terms of equally joyous affirmation. In so interpreting the words, it will be observed that we are following the English R.V. The A.V. depending on other authorities for the text, gives the blessing in the usual form: "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace." 2 John 1–3.

Possibly there was no rigidly fixed form of greeting in the Apostolic age. This one departs from the usual Pauline form, and only finds a parallel in the two Epistles to Timothy. It was St. Paul's general practice to invoke "grace" and "peace" upon his readers. In the two Epistles to Timothy he interposes the word "mercy" and the same threefold invocation is employed by the Elder in the present passage.

The three words are intimately related and the interpretation of them may be found in the experience of the redeemed Christian. They express the beginning and the end of God's loving dealing with man. Grace indicates, as it were, the initial attitude, the loving disposition on the part of God, from which all the rest follows. Mercy is grace expressing itself in action; coming to man in his dire need and bringing to him salvation. Peace is the happy condition of the heart redeemed and restored by God's gracious mercy displayed to us in Christ.

2 John 1–3. "Grace." Each of the three words may be considered again, not so much in relation to the other two, but with reference to its own wealth of meaning. If we ask why God should be gracious, we can only reply that it is because God is Love. That is the ultimate fundamental fact about God, from which all that we predicate of Him is derivable. He does what He does because He is what He is, and the Scriptural conception of grace is that of the Divine Love stooping to man and imparting itself to him. Grace always implies a personal relationship, God bestowing and man receiving. To conceive it in any sub-personal way, in any way that in the least degree approaches the mechanical, is to do injustice to the thought of Scripture. Any idea of grace as an impersonal influence flowing through appointed channels is a thought that introduces entirely alien conceptions.

The outstanding characteristic of the Divine grace—so attractive, especially to the thought of St. Paul—is that it is free, self-prompted and undeserved. We on our part, can exercise love; but usually it is in response to some attracting stimulus; there is something in the object which we love, that evokes the love we feel. God, on the other hand, loves us, not because we are in any sense worthy of His love, but because He *is* Love, that is because He is God. It is not merely that we do not deserve His love. We deserve something very different. But "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us".

"Mercy." And if "grace" expresses the attitude of Divine Love to us, in our undeserving sinful condition,

" mercy " expresses the attitude of the same Love to us in our weakness and wretchedness. It is because we are not only sinful, but unhappy and miserable in our sinfulness that the Divine grace manifests itself to us in all the gentleness and tenderness of mercy. 2 John 1–3.

And when God in His grace and mercy has dealt so lovingly with us, the result is peace ; peace with God, peace in our own previously distracted hearts, peace on our part, with our fellow men. The Divine peace is something that flows in and possesses us. We are aware of its beneficent presence but we cannot analyse or explain it. It " passeth all understanding ", but it guards our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus. " Peace."

The threefold blessing comes to us not only from God the Father, but from Jesus Christ, " the Son of the Father." This last phrase is unique in the New Testament writings. It seems to be deliberately chosen to emphasize the truth on which the Elder lays most stress, the truth that the Father has actually revealed Himself to men in the person of His Incarnate Son. Those to whom he wrote were in danger of erroneous teaching about this, and he here dwells positively on the truth with which his warning will have to do.

The blessing comes from God to man " in truth and love " ; that is to say, it is realized both in the sphere of thought and in the sphere of action. These two words are the keynotes of the Epistle. The Elder will plead with his readers to keep steadfastly in the truth they have received and believed. He will entreat them also to display the love which flows from that truth.

2 John 4–6. **"I rejoice greatly that I have found certain of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote to thee a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we should walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, even as ye heard from the beginning, that ye should walk in it."**—2 John, 4–6.

The Elders' Joy.

A few words of interpretation here may help to make the general meaning clearer. The Revisers have translated the opening word by a present tense in English: "I rejoice". They have regarded the aorist tense in the Greek as being the "Epistolary aorist", a Greek idiom which is usually translated into English by a present tense.

It is possible, however—and, some commentators think, more probable—that the verb should be rendered in English by a past tense: "I rejoiced," and that the reference is to some previous occasion on which the Elder had found that certain members of the Church to which he is writing had been living consistent Christian lives.

It appears that this approval is limited to "certain" of these members; rather implying that there were others to whom such praise could not be given. Still, where praise is due he gladly gives it. It was not only an expression of Christian kindliness, but was in accordance with the general form of letter-writing of the age, to open with some expression of praise or thankfulness.

We cannot say, certainly, whether the Elder refers to an occasion on which he, in person, met these "children" and observed, for himself, their conduct; or whether, as is suggested by 3 John 3,

he heard of them from the lips of travelling Christian brethren who brought to him the good report of them. In either case, they caused him to rejoice. 2 John 4–6.

The word "walking" signifies conduct in the ordinary course of life. It suggests not only action, but habitual action. It also suggests the idea of progress towards a particular goal. It was the everyday behaviour of the "children" in the routine business of life that rejoiced the heart of the Elder. He found this behaviour to be a carrying out of the "commandment" received from the Father.

The "Commandment."

It is not quite clear which form of the New Commandment is here implied. It may be the command to love as Christ loved: "And this Commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John iv. 21). Or it may be the command to believe and to love: "And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as He gave us commandment" (1 John iii. 23).

"Love One Another."

There follows now the exhortation. It is put in the form of a personal request, from equal to equal, on the ground of their equal standing before the common Lord. It is the entreaty for the continuance of mutual love. For Christian speaking to Christian it is nothing new; it is only the recalling of the command which Christ gave to His followers and which when He gave it was new. The obvious reference is to our Lord's words in the Upper Room: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye

2 John 4–6. love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another".

In the concluding word of this section there is some ambiguity. "And this is love, that we should walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, even as ye heard from the beginning, that ye should walk in it." To what does this final "it" refer, the love, or the commandment? Most probably the former. St. John speaks of walking "in truth" or "in darkness" or "in light", but not of walking "in commandments" or "in a commandment". When the whole context is taken into account the most natural meaning seems to be that walking "in it" means walking "in love".

Love and Duty.

After this more detailed exposition of the various parts of the Apostolic counsel, we may pause, for a moment, to dwell on its general purport as a whole. It centres round the twin ideas of love and duty. These are its two great keynotes. The Elder first says that the commandment laid upon us by God, in Christ, is to love. He then says that love consists in or manifests itself in keeping God's commandments. It might, to a superficial criticism, seem that this is an argument in a circle. It is the Elder's way of saying that love and duty are inseparably united. Each requires the other for its fullest expression. Love, without any corresponding idea of duty, may degenerate into a pious emotionalism; it may become erratic, fantastic, extravagant. Duty, uninspired by love, may become chill and irksome; if there be no love the keeping of commandments becomes an intolerable bondage. In his former Epistle he had

said: "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." They are not grievous because love makes them light. They are not like the "burdens grievous to be borne" which Pharisaism had laid on the consciences of men. Christianity has its obligations, but He Who imposed them said: "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." And this is so because the wearing of the yoke and the bearing of the burden is simply love's response to the Divine Love. 2 John 4–6.

"For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward. Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works."— 2 JOHN, 7–11.

The above passage—the Apostle's warning—is the rendering of our English Revised Version. Those who study that Version in connection with the Authorized Version, will observe that in one or two instances different authorities have been followed, with a decided difference in meaning. 2 John 7–11.

In the first sentence the A.V. renders "are entered into the world". The R.V. preferring a slightly different Greek reading renders "are gone forth into the world". A more important case of difference is that in v. 9 the A.V. renders "Whosoever transgresseth". The R.V. following much stronger MS. authority reads "Whosoever goeth onward", giving an entirely different sense. There are other slight

2 John 7–11.

differences in detail, but they do not affect the meaning so materially as those just mentioned.

The "Deceivers."

For many deceivers are gone forth into the world.—The word "for" with which this section opens, obviously links it on to the preceding one. It is because of the grave state of things that he is going to describe that the exhortation he has already given is seen to be so necessary. We might expand his meaning into some such form as this: "Be joined together in genuine Christian love and manifest that love in a consistent Christian walk. To do so is your strongest safeguard against error. This fear of error is no idle or misplaced one 'for' many deceivers are gone forth . . ."

The marked hostility of the writer to these "deceivers" is due to his conviction that their teachings will lead not only to wrong opinion but to wrong conduct. A man's intellectual convictions are bound, in the long run, to influence his way of living, and it was probably what the Elder had already seen of the disastrous effects of the false teaching on the lives of those who had received it, that inspired the severity of his language. When he says of these deceivers that they had "gone forth" into the world, he may simply mean that they have gone forth from the Evil One into the "world", which is in his dominion. But the words seem more naturally to indicate that they had originally been members of the Christian Church from which they had now parted company and had gone forth to spread their tenets in the world at large.

The fundamental error of the "deceivers" was the

denial of the Incarnation; they denied not merely the fact but the possibility of the fact. They said that it was inconceivable and impossible that God should manifest himself in flesh and live in this world a human life. 2 John 7–11.

How could Christian believers have come to hold such a view at all? It was probably because of the influence upon them of "Gnosticism". It may help us to understand the general situation and especially the attitude of St. John, if we recall one or two of the main features of this widely spread way of thinking. The word comes from the Greek word "gnosis" meaning knowledge, and it indicates in itself one of the most prevalent characteristics of the system, which was to insist on the supremacy of the intellect and to assert the superiority of enlightenment over faith and conduct. This glorification of the purely intellectual may be said to be the Greek element in Gnosticism. Its other main element is the view that matter, the material world generally, in all its variety of forms, is essentially and hopelessly evil. This element is Oriental in origin.

These tendencies of thought had been present in the world before the rise of Christianity. Judaism had been affected by them; both Greek and Oriental religions betray traces of their influence. They penetrated into the Christian Church at the earliest stages of its life. That Church inherited the Old Testament Scriptures with their assertion that the world is created by God; and its very foundation was the conviction that God was incarnate in Christ and that the Divine life had been manifested in flesh.

2 John 7–11.

What would those who held the tenets of Gnosticism say to the upholders of the Christian faith ? They said in effect : " We do not oppose your views, but we explain them to you. Your views must be interpreted on intellectual lines and in harmony with the fundamental conception that all which is material is evil. Your Gospel narrative tells of Christ living a human life in flesh. That cannot be. How could the Divine Word be joined to a material body which, just because it is material is impure ? We may allow that Christ is divine, but in that case His body was merely a phantom. The whole story of His words and actions, which the plain man finds so comforting, is pure illusion. He seemed to be, indeed, a man, but in reality He was not. If this seems a hard saying you must remember that the truth about these things is only grasped by the intellectual few. What the ordinary Christian takes as literal fact, the few who have ' knowledge ', who are intellectually enlightened, will view in a very different way. And this intellectual enlightenment permitted only to the very few, is the highest thing of all. To ' know ' is everything ; and the wise man who wishes to add to the store of what he ' knows ' will permit his body, which in any case is evil, to go through all experiences, however shameful and impure, simply in order to enlarge his experience, to increase the fulness of his knowledge." Another view, taken by some schools of Gnostics, was that the body was not in this way to be used as an instrument of knowledge ; in order that true knowledge might be reached, it must be entirely suppressed and trodden underfoot. The application

of Gnostic principles to conduct might, therefore, lead to extreme license or to the sternest and most unnatural asceticism. 2 John 7–11.

The result, then, of the impact of Gnosticism on Christianity and of the entrance of teachers holding Gnostic views, into the Church was that in claiming to give a "higher" interpretation of Christianity, it completely disintegrated and demolished it; in professing to "explain" to Christians their own distinctive tenets, it completely explained them away.

Can we wonder that the attitude of St. John is uncompromising and that his language is relentlessly severe? He saw, more clearly than we, in our sophisticated age, see now, the perilous nature of over-intellectualism, meaning by that an intellectualism that is elevated at the expense of faith and conduct, that will also forsake historic facts for airy and fantastic imaginings. The long opening sentence of his first Epistle is his indignant protest against the treacherous and destructive nature of this latter attitude of mind.

In one way the impact of Gnosticism on Christianity was not an unmixed evil. It compelled Christianity to give an account of itself in relation to the general thought of the age and the problems about God, man and the world, with which thoughtful men were occupied. It stimulated the early theologians to show that God incarnate in Christ, is the key to the solution of the problems not only of practical life but of speculative thought. To do this meant both hard thinking and close study of the Scriptures. The Elder,

2 John 7–11.

however, is chiefly concerned with the demoralizing effect that such influences would have not only upon the beliefs, but on the life and conduct of the Christian converts. He sees in these influences nothing that is good, and everything that is bad. **This**, he says, **is the deceiver and the anti-Christ.**

The R.V. with its emphatic use of the definite article more closely represents the Greek than does the A.V. The two words employed express the two aspects of this erroneous teaching. The man who gives it is in relation to his fellow men, a deceiver ; with relation to Christ he is " anti-Christ ". The reference is probably not to any individual, but the whole drift and effect of the false teaching is expressed in this individualized form.

" Anti-Christ."

The word " anti-Christ " is peculiar, in the New Testament to the Johannine Epistles. It seems to include the ideas of hostility and rivalry. The anti-Christ is one who is not only opposed to Christ, but wishes to usurp His place. From the fact that the term is introduced without explanation we may infer that it was a familiar one to the writer and his readers. The passages in which the term occurs are 1 John ii. 18, 22, iv. 3, and the one here before us in 2 John. These should all be carefully studied. When they are all taken together it is impossible to say with absolute certainty whether St. John meant by the term an impersonal power or principle displaying itself in the words and conduct of individuals, or whether he meant an actual particular person. 1 John ii. 18 seems to point to an individual. 1 John ii. 22, iv. 3, and 2 John 7 seem rather to

indicate a general spirit or principle animating individuals. In this connection the further question arises whether by the term "anti-Christ" St. John means the same thing that St. Paul means in 2 Thessalonians ii. 3, when he speaks of "the man of sin . . . the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. The language of St. Paul seems clearly to point to an individual, and if we conclude—as seems most natural—that the two Apostles are speaking with the same reference, we shall draw the inference that St. John's meaning is, that while the spirit of anti-Christ may display itself in the words and deeds of men, it will find its supreme manifestation in an individual of surpassing power of malignity whose appearance will have some connection with the Second Advent of our Lord.

2 John 7–11.

This inference seems to be borne out by the passages of Daniel (ix. 27, xii. 11) from which the conception was probably first derived. The Jews certainly believed that Antiochus Epiphanes was anti-Christ, and the early Christians thought in the same way of the Emperor Nero. He died in A.D. 68, but it was confidentially believed that he would return and would stand forth as the very incarnation of evil and the opponent of the Lord.

It is then, of that supreme foe to God, that these teachers to whom the Apostle refers, are the emissaries and representatives. Against them his hearers must be on their guard. Apostles and Evangelists have

2 John 7–11.

brought the Gospel and planted it in their midst. If they would gather the fruit of this work, they must detect and reject the specious and false teachings which, in the name of higher knowledge, are being laid before them.

"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works."—2 JOHN, 9–11.

2 John 9–11.

We have already noted the difference between the A.V. and the R.V. in the opening words of this passage. In reading "Whosoever goeth onward" the R.V. is following superior manuscript authority. The expression is to be understood as a sarcastic reference to the claims of these false teachers to possess a higher knowledge and a more progressive intelligence. At a later stage this seems to have been misunderstood, and so the more obvious and more easily understood reading "Whosoever transgresseth" was introduced into the text. It is the R.V. reading, which seems, on any ground, to be the original reading, that we are here concerned.

Going "Onward" beyond Christ.

"Goeth onward" indicates progress or advancement in teaching, and what the Apostle here asserts is that any progress or advance that goes so far onward as to leave behind "the teaching of Christ" is false and destructive in character. It "hath not God".

The Greek makes it somewhat more clear than the English that the Apostle is not condemning progress of any kind, but only such progress as involves separation from and repudiation of "the teaching of Christ".

The phrase " the teaching of Christ " does not mean " teaching about Christ ", teaching of which He is the object, but the teaching which He brought, which He set forth in His life both by word and deed. It may include the idea of the continuance of His teaching by His followers, but the emphasis is on the fact that it is His, brought by Him, and declared by Him. 2 John 9–11.

Hath not God. The false teacher claims to have and to inculcate a more perfect knowledge of God than is possible for the simple believer in the Gospel. The Apostle asserts that, on the contrary, in departing from " the teaching of Christ ", Who is the revelation of God to man, he knows nothing of God ; indeed, in the most absolute sense " he hath not God ". Whereas, on the other hand, " he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son."

It has been observed—and the observation seems to be true—that this passage is a brief summary of what is said, at somewhat greater length, in 1 John ii. 22 ff. " Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ ? This is the anti-Christ, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father ; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father."

As we reflect on these words we find ourselves dealing with two complementary truths the precise correlation of which has often been a matter of

2 John 9–11.

trouble and conflict in the history of Christian thinking. There is, on the one hand, a sense in which we must go onward ; we must grow, advance, progress. On the other hand we must remain loyal to " the teaching of Christ ". Professor George Jackson, of Didsbury College, has put the point well in a recent address. " We are," he says, " Modernists. . . . We cannot help ourselves ; if we are to think at all we must think as modern men. Yes, but we are Christians too, and we are Christians first, and there must be no reservations here." The trouble has been, as he points out later, that we have left it to one section of Christians to " advance " and to another to " abide ", and so a perilous and distracting schism has been set up. There has been a tendency to regard the " scholars " as being in one camp and the " saints " in another. This is a disastrous and unnatural division. The late Dr. Denney used to say that the ideal would be reached when our scholars were our evangelists and our evangelists our scholars. This may be a counsel of perfection ; but it should always be before us as an ideal. To quote Dr. Jackson's own words again : " At all costs we must make an end for ever of the desolating antagonisms and suspicions of the past. To have the scholar and the evangelist at cross purposes is to sterilize the Church's best endeavour. Evangelism which is afraid of scholarship has only a maimed Gospel, which will only commend itself to maimed men. Scholarship without an evangel is as futile as the wheeling of swallows round the church steeple."

In this picturesque clause, " scholarship without

an evangel is as futile as the wheeling of swallows round the church steeple," Dr. Jackson is stating the truth that is enunciated by the Apostle in the stern and uncompromising words before us : " Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God." 2 John 9–11.

If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting.

These words, too, are animated by the same stern and uncompromising spirit. The Apostle would exclude not only the false teaching, but the teachers who bring it. The construction of the Greek implies that he is not dealing with a merely supposed possibility. Such teachers actually *do* come to the Church to which he is writing ; and the form of the Greek imperative suggests that the members of that Church must now stop doing what they have been accustomed to do. They must cease to receive and to greet these men.

Justifiable Severity.

It has been said that the severity of this injunction is almost without parallel in the New Testament, and the question has been debated how far, if at all, we are justified in acting on such a precept now. In discussing this matter, and so, in seeming to criticize the Apostle, we must be careful to do two things ; in the first place, to understand exactly what he says, and in the second place, to realize clearly the circumstances in which he spoke.

When he says " cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching " he is not alluding to the casual visits of any strangers who might come seeking

2 John 9–11.

hospitality. The words rather point to the formal arrival of those who claimed to be regarded as "teachers" and whose object was to lay before the members of the Church their own "advanced" tenets. The very aim of their visit was to expound their views and win converts to them. And, apparently, they claimed this opportunity to expound their views as a right on the ground of being fellow Christians. Such a claim the Apostle firmly resists; they have no right to be heard as teachers in the assembly of Christians, because—in his view—they have ceased to be Christians.

The Apostle views the matter from the pastoral standpoint; from the side of the responsibility which he, as the shepherd, has for the welfare of the flock. To welcome these teachers, formally, as Christian brethren—especially when he knows already what the essence of their teaching is, and what are likely to be its results, would be to work irreparable harm on whose who listened to them; it would also confirm the teachers in their own error and seriously limit the possibility of their conversion to the truth. A spirit of general toleration which ignored all this might in the long run do far more harm than good. When we realize the gravity of the situation by which the Apostle was confronted and the risks to which his converts were exposed, we shall be little inclined to charge him with hardness or unchristian severity. Indeed it is hardly too much to say that in the absence of such an attitude as this, the Church might have lost the true conception of Christ, and might, in the end, have lost Christ Himself.

Its Message for To-Day

If we ask the question: "How far ought we, to-day, to act in the spirit and the letter of this injunction?" the answer is not an easy one to give. On the one hand it may be said that the example of our Lord should be our great pattern, and that we must not forget His Spirit of Divine compassion and mercy. We should also remember that we live in the twentieth century and not in the first. We should ask ourselves too how far kindness towards an erring teacher may be a more efficient corrective than severity. All such points may well receive due consideration. On the other hand the father of a family who feels paternal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his children; or the pastor of a church, who prays and works for the people committed to his charge, may be deeply conscious of the harm that may be done to his household or his church by the advent of some teacher bringing definitely non-Christian or anti-Christian teaching. With every wish to be tolerant and open-minded, he may well feel that the only right course, in view of his own responsibilities, is to decline to receive such teachers into his home and church. It is true that his children or the members of his church may go out and find such teaching if they wish to hear it. That he cannot help. But his own soul is clear; he has not definitely helped to put it in their way.

2 John 9–11.

It is, perhaps, not an easy thing to decide about teachers and their teaching; to say what is merely curious, and what is definitely pernicious. No man wishes to seem or to be narrow-minded and intolerant. On the other hand there is the question of loyalty

2 John 9–11. to the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ, and so, of loyalty to Jesus Christ Himself. In the passage before us the Apostle makes it clear that he drew the line absolutely at all teaching which had "advanced" so far as to have parted company from "the teaching of Christ", that is the gospel of Christ the incarnate Son of God. In such case he would neither have his converts tolerate the teaching nor welcome the teachers.

"Having many things to write unto you, I would not *write them* with paper and ink: but I hope to come unto you and to speak face to face, that your joy may be fulfilled. The children of thine elect sister salute thee."—2 JOHN, 12, 13.

2 John 12–13. The words of this brief conclusion need little comment. It will be observed that they closely resemble the closing words of the Third Epistle. The word "paper" denotes papyrus, which, like parchment, was somewhat expensive. In fact, the cost of the writing material may partly account for the brevity of the Apostle's letter. Papyrus was not only expensive but perishable; and this may account, again, for the non-survival of the Apostolic autographs.

The Apostle has felt compelled by the immediate urgency of the situation to write this letter, brief though it is. He hopes soon to visit his readers, confident that when he can address them "face to face", all the clouds of error and misunderstanding will be cleared away and their joy "may be fulfilled".

If we are right in supposing this letter to be written to a church, and not to an individual, "the children of thine elect sister" will refer to the members of some Church, probably that of Ephesus.

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

It may be found most convenient in our reading of this Epistle, to view it from three separate sides; in the first place to consider generally its contents and the circumstances in which it was written; secondly, to indicate out one or two points of translation, more especially those in which the R.V. differs from the A.V.; thirdly, to learn so far as we may, the lessons of permanent value that its words contain. 3 John 1.

I

Whatever view we may accept about the Second Epistle there is no doubt that the Third one is a private personal letter written to a hospitable Christian, named Gaius. It is a specimen of the "epistles of commendation" constantly employed in the early days of the history of the Church. Its primary aim is revealed towards the end; it is to commend to the kindly notice of Gaius, a certain Christian named Demetrius, who will be coming—possibly, with a band of fellow missionaries—to the Church of which Gaius is a member. Before reaching this point, however, the Apostle has certain things to say, which throw a very interesting light on the conditions of Church life at the time. He praises Gaius

3 John 1. for having already so notably displayed the virtue of hospitality, a virtue which was indispensable for the very life of the Church in its earliest days. Fellow Christians who came from some other Church, or, who paid a passing visit in the course of an evangelistic tour, must be welcomed, entertained and set forward on their journey. This was all the more necessary, because such evangelists followed the Pauline practice of taking no reward or renumeration from the Gentiles to whom they preached. Members of the Church who stayed at home could help in the work by contributing to the support of the workers. Gaius had already stood forth as a leader in this matter. The Apostle praises him and exhorts him to persist in carrying on the good work.

All the leading members of the Church, however, were not like Gaius. The mention of a certain Diotrephes introduces a jarring note into the harmony. Whether he was simply an ambitious self-willed member of the Church, or also held an official position within it, cannot be clearly ascertained. The fact that he was not only able to forbid the reception of visiting Christians, but to cast out of the Church those who did receive them, *seems* to indicate that he was the leading presbyter. In any case his attitude was one of uncompromising hostility to the Apostle and those who sided with him. He wished, apparently, to make the Church of which he was a member independent of any sort of control by the Apostle. St. John says that he has already written a letter to the Church, which letter would naturally, we may infer, come into the hands of Diotrephes, its leading

official. He doubts, however, whether this letter will have any effect, and therefore writes a private letter to Gaius, in order that he and his friends may be cheered and confirmed in their loyalty to St. John. A letter, however, is an inadequate means of doing what the situation requires. The Apostle hopes soon to pay a personal visit, when he will thoroughly expose Diotrephes, by setting forth the full record of his iniquities. He will also " speak face to face " in happy conversation with those who are his friends. 3 John 1.

Of the three men mentioned in the Epistle, Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius, we know nothing, certainly, except what is said in the Epistle. Conjectures have been made as to the identification of Gaius with one or other of those bearing the name in other New Testament passages. But as the name was one of the commonest in the Roman Empire any identification on this ground alone, must be extremely precarious. Similarly the suggestion has been made that Demetrius is the silversmith of that name who formerly made shrines of Diana and aroused his fellow craftsmen to oppose St. Paul; the idea being that he afterwards became a convert and the friend of St. John. Here again, the suggestion is not impossible; but that is the utmost that can be said for it. Those who like to see, in his case, another instance of the persecutor transformed into the ardent missionary, are free to do so. But the idea is one that must remain within the realm of fancy; it has no place in the sphere of ascertained historic fact.

II

3 John 1. We have now to consider one or two points of translation. The first is in verse 2. The A.V. there gives us: "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." The R.V. is more accurate in translating "I pray" in place of "I wish". It also is more accurate in the rendering "in all things" than "above all things". The A.V. seems to make St. John put health and prosperity *above* all things. We should hardly have expected him to do this and, as a matter of fact, his words do not do so. The Greek is more adequately rendered by the R.V. translation: "I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth".

In verse 3, though the point be a small one, it may be noted that "brethren" in the R.V. (without the article) is nearer to the Greek than "the brethren" of the A.V.

In verse 5, too, the A.V. introduces a distinction, which is not present in the Greek. It speaks of kindly action "to the Brethren and to strangers." But the point of the passage, brought out by the R.V., is that the brethren to whom the kindly action was done, *were* strangers, "toward them that are brethren and strangers withal".

In verse 6 it is certainly better to translate with the R.V., "who bare witness to thy love" in place of "which have borne witness of thy charity" of the A.V. The tense of the verb is more accurate, and the Greek word "agapē" should, without

question, both here and elsewhere, be translated "love". In fact, to confuse it here with "charity" in the sense of almsgiving would be entirely to misrepresent the Apostle's meaning. 3 John 1.

"Worthily of God", too, at the end of the verse, is an improvement on "after a Godly sort" of the A.V.

In verse 7 it is at once more accurate and more impressive to read, with the R.V. "for the sake of the Name" they went forth, than with A.V. "for His Name's sake".

In verse 14 there is a point in which the translators of the A.V. have introduced a variation, possibly to avoid verbal repetition. But as the repetition is there in the Greek, there seems no reason why it should not be reproduced in the English, as the R.V. translators reproduce it. The A.V. has: "Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name." The R.V. more accurately gives: "The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name."

III

After the mention of these points of verbal detail we are now free to consider the contents of the Epistle. There is, strictly speaking, no theology in it at all. It is a private letter concerned with matters of practical import. That this is so, is seen by a statement of the divisions into which it naturally falls:

The Salutation (v. 1).

Personal good wishes to Gaius and congratulations that he is walking "in the truth" (vv. 2–4).

3 John 1. Praise to Gaius for his hospitality, especially to brethren who were strangers (vv. 5–8).

Allusion to the arrogant conduct and unconcealed hostility of Diotrephes towards the Apostle and his friends (vv. 9–11).

Commendation of Demetrius (v. 12).

Concluding salutation (vv. 13, 14).

"The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth." —3 JOHN, 1.

Here, in the usual way, we have the reference to the sender and recipient of the letter. It departs slightly from the customary form in that there is no expression of greeting; the prayer that comes in the following verses may be said to include it.

We adopt the view that the Apostle St. John is the writer, and that here, as in the Second Epistle, he designates himself as "The elder" simply, a term of affectionate respect by which he was generally known.

It will be observed that Gaius is not addressed as holding any distinctive office in the Church.

On the other hand, it is clear from what follows that he occupied a prominent position. He also held a high place in the exteem of the Apostle himself.

"Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth. Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."—3 JOHN, 2–4.

3 John 2–4. The Apostle is quite assured that the soul of Gaius is in good health, and he has no better wish to offer for his bodily welfare and his worldly matters than that they should be in equally good health. His words

are, as Dr. Plummer says, "a model for all friendly wishes of good fortune to others." 3 John 2–4.

Spiritual Health and Material Prosperity.

They have a permanent value because they express for us exactly the right relationship between spiritual and material prosperity. The spiritual has the first place and significance, but the material is not ignored. The Apostle is speaking in the spirit of his Master's words: "Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." He puts the first things first; but having done so, he does not refrain from praying for his friend that he may prosper in health and in worldly goods. And from him we may learn that it is legitimate and right to offer the same prayer for our friends too.

We must not indeed forget the proper relationship, the subordination of the material to the spiritual. Disaster begins for the Christian, and indeed for any man, when the order is reversed and material welfare becomes the supreme object of desire to the total exclusion of any spiritual interest. We recall, then, the words of our Lord: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God."

The human soul is infinitely varied in character and its "prosperity" might be described in an infinite variety of ways. In the particular case of Gaius, the Apostle goes on to indicate, in the following verses, the way in which his conduct displayed the sound and healthy condition of his soul. He walked in the truth, and Christian brethren bore willing testimony to the fact that he did so. His daily walk was the indication of the prosperity of his soul. Brethren who experienced his Christian kindness

3 John 2–4. reported it to St. John, who in a reflective way, pauses to add his own personal affirmation; "even as thou walkest in truth." Some commentators think that the "thou" is meant to be emphasized; "thou" in contrast with others who, in their conduct, are displaying such a different spirit.

The Apostle's words reveal to us his own conviction as to the fundamental secret of true prosperity of the soul. It is to possess the truth; it is to be inspired and controlled by it. And, for him, the "truth" meant simply Jesus Christ, the embodiment and manifestation of God's own truth. We are probably doing no injustice to his deepest conviction if we put it that Jesus Christ dwelling in the soul is the essential cause of the soul's truest health and progress.

We say "progress" as well as "health" because St. John's words seem to imply this as an element in the soul's prosperity. "Thou *walkest* in truth." Even if there seem, in this, to be a mixture of metaphors it is only such as is required by the manifold fulness of the reality about which he is speaking. The truth is something that is within us. It is also a road along which we must walk. The idea of walking on a road includes that of conduct, practical activity; it also includes that of progress towards a distant goal. And the road towards that goal is along a defined and prescribed path. Once again our thoughts go back to the words of the Master: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." The prosperous soul is one that not only contemplates and meditates, but *walks*—moves onward to fuller knowledge and nobler action—always, however, keeping to a track

that is within the limits of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and is illumined by its light. The Apostle who had heard the command given to feed the Saviour's lambs and to tend His sheep has no higher joy than to know that his converts are walking, as he knows Gaius to be walking, "in the Truth." 3 John 2–4.

"Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal; who bear witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God: because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth."—3 JOHN, 5–8.

3 John 5–8. The Good Work of Gaius.

In this section of the Epistle, the Apostle may be said to continue his statement of the grounds on which he rejoices in the spiritual "prosperity" of his friend. Gaius had given hospitality and help to certain visiting Christians—possibly missionaries—who were strangers to him, personally. We may infer, from what follows in the Epistle, that he had incurred displeasure and condemnation for this at the hands of some, at any rate, of the members of the Church; and St. John hastens, here, to express most emphatic approval of his conduct, with the hope that he will continue steadfastly to exercise this ministry of love.

It is not easy to be sure about the exact meaning of the opening words; but to interpret the expression: "Thou doest a faithful work" as meaning "thou doest an action corresponding to the faith that is in thee", "thy hospitable conduct is an expression of that faith which inspires thee," seems to be at once most obvious and most probable. The words that follow, tell their own story. The brethren who

3 John 5–8. had been so graciously received by Gaius had, on returning from their evangelistic tour, borne public and grateful testimony to his hospitality. The heart of St. John, too, is full of gratitude, and he beseeches Gaius to persist in this particular form of Christian activity, to continue to set them forward on their journey in a way worthy of the God whose servants they are as he is also.

Because for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. These words explain why such hospitality as that of Gaius was at once so necessary and so acceptable. These missionary workers " went forth " that is, they had started on a missionary tour or campaign from some Christian centre, not improbably the Church at Ephesus. It was their general practice, not only on this, but on all occasions, to carry out their work without taking any support from the Gentiles to whom they proclaimed their message, lest they should be open to the suspicion of working for personal gain. To men labouring under these self-imposed conditions the hospitality of Gaius, and those who acted with him, was a most effective support. It was an indispensable contribution to the work.

The call to Gaius to aid these workers by his hospitality lay in the fact that " for the sake of the Name they went forth ", the Name, being obviously and certainly, that of Jesus Christ. We see, from the record in Acts, that " the Name " had very early come to be used as a synonym for Jesus. At the first outbreak of persecution the Apostles " rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for

the Name ". These later evangelists, too, went out to proclaim that " neither is there any other Name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved ". It was " in the interests of ", " on behalf of " that " Name " that they went forth on their work of evangelization. 3 John 5–8.

The " Name " of Christ.

This use of the term " Name " in place of the person to whom it belongs goes back to the Old Testament. To the Semitic mind the name of a person or thing was no mere distinctive label. It was something that expressed the character, the essential qualities, of the owner. It stood for his personality ; so much so that to know the true name of a person or thing, was to go a long way towards exercising control over that to which the name belonged. When this significance of the " name " is realized we can unberstand something of the tremendous reverence with which the Jews treated the name of God, shrinking even from taking it on their lips, and preferring to use some synonym or periphrasis.

For the Christian the " Name " of Christ meant all that Christ was, and is, to the Christian consciousness, His divinity, His kindly gracious humanity, His supreme self-sacrifice, His resurrection, with its present life and power, His dominion in Heaven. All that the Gospel tells of Him, all that the Christian deliever has found Him to be, is summed up in " the Name ", and Christian experience has found expression in some of our favourite hymns :

" Dear Name ! the rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding place."

and " To the Name of our Salvation
Laud and honour let us pay."

3 John 5–8. There is something impressive, almost awe-inspiring in this absolute use of "the Name" as applied to our Lord. It implies what is unique and supreme; for, as St. Paul expresses it, it is "the Name which is above every Name". We are justified, too, in supposing that this usage on the part of the earliest Christians, was tantamount to an expression of belief in their Master's divinity; for they deliberately transferred the Old Testament usage with regard to the Name of God to that of Jesus Christ.

The phrase "for the sake of the Name" conveys to us a very wonderful truth and, at the same time, a call to action. It reminds us that the humblest Christian—for these unknown Christians of Asia Minor were very humble people—can do something to help "the Name" of Jesus and to forward His cause. It is part of the mystery and the marvel of the Gospel that Christ condescends to depend on the efforts of His followers for the furtherance of His work. St. John has expressed it in the words which conclude this section: "That we may be fellow workers with the truth."

The interpretation of this passage presents some difficulties, but we shall perhaps be nearest to the intention of the writer if we regard him as meaning that the Truth is an active force in the world; and that both those who preach it and those who support them are each, in their several ways, co-operating with the Truth. And by the Truth, as we have already said, we may suppose that he means no body of abstract principles, but Jesus Christ Himself "in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden".

So regarded, the words carry on the thought suggested by the previous clause, "for the sake of the Name." They remind us that those who have found Jesus to be the Truth must be workers with the Truth. Possession of the Truth must beget something of the missionary Spirit, if it be only a great desire that others may be gladdened by the light that has shined into our hearts, may have a share in the treasure by which we have been enriched. Some may go a step beyond this and devote their whole life to the proclamation of the Gospel. Others may elect to live the Christian life in the doing of the world's everyday work; but these can co-operate with each other and both together can co-operate with and for Him Who is the Truth. He honours us by using us as His instruments. It is for us, at once an obligation and a privilege to be used by Him for the carrying out of His gracious purpose. 3 John 5–8.

Does not this reference to Gaius and the helpful work that he did convey a message directly to our twentieth century life? There are now, as there have been before, noble-hearted men and women who respond to the missionary call, and "go forth" "for the sake of the Name". But it is difficult to make the members of the home Church as a whole realize how greatly they can help if they, while remaining at home, will "set forward on their journey" these others "worthily of God". "There are diversities of workings." To maintain the home base of operations, to see that due and adequate provision is made for the workers in distant fields, is just as necessary and just as honourable a form of work as that of

3 John 5–8. evangelization. Those who will strenuously and consistently attend to this are indeed, in their way "fellow-workers with the Truth". Too often, it is to be feared, the attitude of many Christians at home is that of those who neither know nor care. They have no interest in such matters and they rather resent the invitation to co-operate. The name of Gaius stands out brightly on the page of Scripture to illumine the path on which they may honourably advance to render service as "fellow-workers with the truth".

"I wrote somewhat unto the Church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words; and not content wherewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would be forbiddeth, and casteth *them* out of the church. Beloved imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God."—3 JOHN, 9–11.

3 John 9–11. When the Apostle says that he "wrote somewhat unto the Church" the question not unnaturally arises whether he is referring to the previous Epistle that we have, 2 John. On the whole it seems more likely that this is not the case, but that the reference is to a letter that we no longer possess; a letter to the Church generally urging that hospitality be shown to Demetrius and his missionary companions. The Apostle was proably aware that that letter would be suppressed or opposed by Diotrephes and so took the precaution of sending with it this private letter to Gaius.

Diotrephes. Diotrephes may, or may not, have been an official of the Church. St. John's reference to him gives no precise indication; but he was certainly a man of

prominence and influence. The two charges made against him by St. John in this passage, are (1) that, inspired by an overwhelming ambition to hold the first place, he indulged in talk against the Apostle and his friends, of a kind that was not only wicked but senseless; (2) that he took up a harsh and forbidding attitude to the missionaries commended by St. John, and, indeed, went so far as to break off relations with those who welcomed them. 3 John 9–11.

St. John, no doubt, has in his mind some particular occasion on which this happened. But the present tenses, in the passage, show that he is referring to a general practice on the part of Diotrephes. His consistent attitude to the Apostle was one of opposition and rancorous hostility. It was this bitter and aggressive spirit that lay at the root of the whole trouble.

There was nothing unwarranted in the making of inquiries about those who might come visiting in the name of Christ. The *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, one of our very early Christian documents, has a reference to this. It says: "Let every one that cometh in the name of the Lord be received; and then when ye have tested him ye shall know him." Provision is made that the visitor shall not stay on in idleness, but shall work in some way. "If he will not do this, he is trafficking upon Christ. Beware of such men."

It would seem, in the case before us, that even when the visitors brought letters of commendation from St. John, Diotrephes declined to receive them. In fact, it was because they had such letters and the

3 John 9–11.

commendation came from that particular quarter, that he was so bitterly exclusive. We cannot be certain that he actually carried out his sentence of excommunication against the supporters of the Apostle, because one of the idiomatic usages of the present tense employed, is to indicate not only continuous but attempted action. The meaning may be that his whole attitude is hostile and exclusive and that his aim and purpose is to eject from the Church those who will not lend him their support.

The condition of things that is disclosed by these words may come as a shock to some readers, especially if they have been inclined to view the history of the earliest Church through rose-coloured spectacles. But we have to see things as they are and not as we should like to imagine them to be. Here, as elsewhere in the sacred record, Scripture not only reveals to us the heights to which man may attain. It depicts him with unfaltering finger as he actually is, even after he has come within the consecrating influences of the Christian Church.

Diotrephes was there in company with Demetrius, Gaius, and St. John.

The Apostle takes the action of Diotrephes as the ground for a general exhortation to Gaius. That action is a particular instance of a general evil spirit. The evil as a whole must be discarded and shunned ; the good which is its absolute opposite must be regarded as the exemplar and consistently copied. The man who habitually "does good" shows by the testimony of his daily conduct that the source and inspiration of his life is "of God". On

the contrary, the man whose life might be described as that of one who "doeth evil" has not taken the first step towards union with God; he has not "seen God". St. John's words put in concise practical form the sentiments he had expressed in his First Epistle: "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither knoweth Him . . . He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. . . . Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in Him: and he cannot sin because he is begotten of God. . . . Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother". 3 John 9–11.

"Demetrius hath the witness of all *men*, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true."—3 JOHN, 12.

Demetrius was one—possibly the leader—of the missionary band which the Apostle was commending to the Church of which Gaius and Diotrephes were members. Some scholars have suggested that Demetrius, on grounds that are quite unknown to us, had fallen under suspicion. This, however, is pure hypothesis. There is nothing in St. John's words to imply it. All we have from him is a comprehensive and emphatic commendation. 3 John 12. Demetrius.

"Demetrius," he says, "hath the witness of all men." The universal "all" is here, probably, to be taken in a relative sense, meaning all that knew him and were interested in the cause for which he worked. There may be included, too, the outer fringe of general public opinion. The upright God-fearing

3 John 12. life of Demetrius was known and respected both in the Church and in the world, by Christians and pagans alike. To direct one's life toward the winning of popular favour may be a contemptible thing. But so to live on disinterested grounds of loyalty to truth, that men in general cannot refuse the meed of approbation and respect, is a noble and a Christ-like thing. It compels admiration even where men shrink from the more arduous and uncongenial line of imitation. It is an effective testimony to the Gospel of Christ when His followers have a good report of " them that are without " and the criticisms that are freely lavished when Christians are detected in unworthy conduct is an admission of the exacting standard which profession of the Christian faith requires.

But Demetrius has also the witness of " the Truth itself ". Here, as before, we shall probably not be wrong, if we personify this expression, and interpret it to mean Jesus Christ Himself. It is not quite easy to be sure of the Apostle's exact meaning. It may perhaps refer to the inner witness within the heart of Demetrius. His conscience was happy because he was aware of the approving voice of Jesus speaking to his soul. Whatever men might say he was sure of the approval of His Lord. Or the words may have a more external reference, and mean that he was observed to be a faithful and loyal follower of Him Who is the Truth. Some, again, have taken the meaning to be that the witness borne by " all men " to Demetrius is not to be regarded simply as human testimony, with its inevitable fallibility, but is

testimony inspired by and confirmed by the Holy Spirit of God Himself. The Apostle may well have meant any or all of these things. To have "the witness of the truth" is a very inclusive phrase, rightly capable of much expansion. 3 John 12.

To such witness as Demetrius already has St. John adds his own emphatic testimony. He puts it in the plural form, the reference probably being to himself and his fellow Christians in the Church from which he writes. In the words "thou knowest that our witness is true" he may simply be asserting the credibility of his own testimony, or, he may imply that Gaius himself knew enough about Demetrius to convince him that the testimony given on his behalf was thoroughly well deserved.

"I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write *them* to thee with ink and pen: but I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name."—3 JOHN, 13, 14.

A marked similarity will be observed in this conclusion to that of the Second Epistle and this, in the absence of any definite evidence to the contrary, may be taken to indicate not only identity of authorship, but that the two letters were written about the same time. He speaks here of the reed, the usual pen of ancient writers, instead of the writing material mentioned in the Second Epistle, but the general intimation there, as here, is that he does not want to write the many things he has to say, but will express them on a personal visit by word of mouth. 3 John 13–14.

The farewell greeting is the Christian prayer, "Peace be unto you". It takes the place of the

3 John 13–14.

general wish that we find for good health in ordinary letters. It recalls, and probably rests on the words of Christ: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you". It is the ancient Jewish greeting filled and enriched by a distinctively Christian content.

The individuality of the salutations to friends and from friends is characteristic of the private letter and is in contrast with the more general salutation that closes the Second Epistle.

Attention has been called by some commentators to the fact that the phrase in the Greek for "by name" occurs in only one other place in the New Testament. The passage is in the description of the Good Shepherd (St. John x. 3); "He calleth His own sheep by name". If we hold that the writer of this letter is also the author of the Fourth Gospel, it will not be fanciful to suppose that he remembered this detail in his Master's portrayal of the ideal Shepherd, the knowing of each sheep in His flock by its own name; and that he in the exercise of his pastoral office made it his business to know and recall by name every member of the flock committed to his charge. Possibly it was only the limited extent of the papyrus sheet on which he was writing that prevented him from mentioning by name the men and women whom he wished to greet.

Christianity has its important social aspects, but its ultimate appeal is to the individual heart. It is because they belong to the flock of One Who "calleth His Own sheep *by name*" that His redeemed ones dwell in perfect peace and find rest unto their souls.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE
OF
ST JUDE

INTRODUCTION

In the opening phrase of this Epistle, the writer of it gives his name as "Judas . . . brother of James". There are several people in the New Testament writings named Judas, and the question at once arises: "With which, if any, of these is the writer to be identified?" Two of the Twelve Apostles, chosen by the Lord, were called Judas. One was Judas Iscariot "which was the traitor", who is obviously excluded. The other was "Judas the Son of James". It is hardly likely that the writer was this Judas, because in verse 17, by his words "the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" he seems to indicate the Apostles as a band of former teachers to whose ranks he does not himself belong. We may infer, then, that he was not Judas the Apostle.

In connection with the record of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts xv., we read of Judas Barsabbas, who was a prophet and a trusted representative of the Church. He was deputed, along with Silas, to convey the decisions of the Council to the brethren of Antioch. We do not know more of him than this; so all that can be said is, that while he was a man of such standing and eminence that he might have written the Epistle, there is no evidence, beyond the identity of name, that he did.

The writer, however, not only gives his name as Judas but describes himself as "brother of James".

The James whose name is here mentioned, without further addition, was evidently a person of eminence in early Christian circles, and is generally supposed to be James, the brother of our Lord, the acknowledged and revered head of the early Christian Church in Jerusalem. In the episode narrated in Mark vi. 3 (cf. Matt. xiii. 55) the Jews, amazed at the wonderful works of Christ, speak of the family to which He belonged, and enumerate His brethren by name. James comes first, apparently as being eldest; one of the others is named Judas, and he, with the greatest degree of probability may be said to be the writer of this Epistle. He is not mentioned by name elsewhere in the New Testament, but at a later stage of Christian history his name reappears, in the story related by Hegesippus, and preserved by Eusebius, about his two grandsons who were taken before the Emperor Domitian. The Roman authorities had taken alarm at the reputed claim of these men to belong to the royal line of David and to be related to the Messiah. When, however, they told the Emperor of the little farm that they shared, and displayed to him their hands, hardened by tilling it; when, too, they told him that the kingdom they looked for was not one of this world, they were contemptuously dismissed as harmless visionaries.

We assume then that our Epistle was written by the Judas who was one of the brothers of the Lord. Whether these brothers were sons of Joseph by a former marriage, or were the children born by the Virgin Mary after the birth of Christ, is a debated point on which we need not enter here.

Is there anything in the subject matter of the Epistle to conflict with the view that it was written by Judas, the brother of James, and of our Lord? Some have held that certain expressions in the Epistle betray the features of a later age, and that it must therefore be assigned to the second century of our era. It has been asserted, for instance, that the writer clearly looks back to the age of the Apostles as a distant epoch. We can discuss this more conveniently when we examine the particular passages. Here it may simply be said that the passages do not, of necessity, imply this. It has been asserted, too, that the description which the writer gives of the evil doings of the "ungodly men" who have intruded into the Church, applies exactly to some of the more depraved sects of the second century Gnostics. Here again the answer is that this inference is not necessary. There were evil livers in the Church in its earliest days, whose wickedness aroused the greatest anxiety in the hearts of the Apostles. There does not appear, then, to be any conclusive reason why the Epistle should not have been written by a writer living in the Apostolic Age.

This impression is confirmed when we examine the acceptance of the Epistle by the earliest writers and the process of its admission to the New Testament Canon. As in the case of other New Testament writings we come across instances in which it is obviously known and used before we come across any express statements as to its authorship. There are some phrases in Polycarp's letter to the Philippines which make it fairly probable that he was familiar

with St. Jude's language. The interest of this is that it, in itself, puts back St. Jude's Epistle to very early days.

When we come to later writers the attestation is very good. The Epistle is included in the Muratorian Canon. It was accepted by the African Father, Tertullian, who supposed it to have been written by Judas the Apostle. It was commented on by Clement of Alexandria.

It is clear, however, as we survey the evidence that this early and general disposition to accept the Epistle was qualified by a certain hesitation. One or two writers who accept the Epistle for themselves indicate that others had doubts about it. Origen, for instance, does so, and Eusebius includes it amongst the books that were " disputed ".

Can we discover the reason for this hesitation ? It is probably to be found in the fact that the writer makes such copious use of so called " apocryphal " writings. He borrows with some freedom, from two such writings, the Book of Enoch, and the Assumption of Moses. It is now generally admitted that both these works had been written and were in circulation, not later than the lifetime of our Lord, so that the use of them is not inconsistent with the view that our Lord's brother was the writer of the Epistle.

But it was the varying estimate in which these apocryphal works were held that affected the reputation of St. Jude's Epistle. At an early stage, as we see in the case of Tertullian's opinion, St. Jude's Epistle itself was the determining factor. Because he quoted these works, the fact that he did so was

sufficient to entitle them to a place in the Canon of Christian writings. But as years went on, and the contents of the Christian Canon became more clearly defined, these "apocryphal" writings came to be regarded with increasing suspicion and distrust and Jerome explicitly tells us that some rejected the Epistle just because of its use of these apocryphal works. In spite, however, of this seeming difficulty, the Epistle ultimately won its way to an unquestioned place in the New Testament Canon.

When we remember how short this Epistle is, that it did not claim to be written by an Apostle, that it contains little in the way of definite theological teaching, that it was prejudiced in the eyes of many by its dependence on apocryphal writings, we are all the more impressed by its wide circulation and early acceptance and we feel the more justified in supposing that it was valued as being the work of the writer whose name it bears.

The fact that it claims to be by Judas, who describes himself so modestly in its opening lines, is in itself a strong argument for supposing it to be an authentic work. A later writer, who wished to pass off his work under some earlier and authoritative name, would probably have employed a more prominent one, and would have put it forward in the opening lines with greater emphasis and with a more pronounced claim.

There are no precise indications as to the date of the Epistle or of the destination to which it was sent. We should infer that Jude was dead before the interview of his grandsons with the Emperor

Domitian, whose reign ended in A.D. 96. On the other hand, there seem to be points of connection with the language of St. Paul's Epistles, which would lead us to suppose that the Epistle was written after A.D. 63. So we may conclude that it belongs to the period between A.D. 65 and 80.

The contents generally seem to justify the supposition that it was written to Gentile readers. More than this it is impossible to say. Dr. Chase suggests Antioch in Syria as the destination, on the ground mainly that the readers were probably converts who had been instructed by St. Paul, and also by other Apostles, and that therefore they lived at no very great distance from Jerusalem. Of this, Dr. Bigg says " no better conjecture can be proposed ; but even this is far from certain ".

One further point remains to be mentioned, and only to be mentioned, here ; the question of the relation of this Epistle to 2 Peter. If the two Epistles be read together it becomes very clear that there is a connection between them. The points of contact are to be seen in Jude 4–16 compared with 2 Peter ii. 1–18, and in Jude 17, 18 compared with 2 Peter iii. 2, 3. The problem that arises is : " Which writer is making use of the work of the other ? Does the shorter Epistle of St. Jude abbreviate what is in 2 Peter, or does the longer 2 Peter incorporate the shorter Epistle of St. Jude ? " The question is a literary one. The supposition that 2 Peter borrows from Jude or that, conversely, Jude borrows from 2 Peter would not exclude the Apostolic authorship of either Epistle. If, however,

2 Peter should, on other grounds, be shown to be a later writing, the work of an unknown author, making use of St. Peter's name, then the conclusion would be strengthened that Jude is the earlier work, and that the writer of 2 Peter makes copious quotations from it. That Jude *is* the earlier of the two writings and that 2 Peter quotes from it is the view that obtains increasing support and that seems, intrinsically, to be most probable. This matter, however, has been treated with somewhat greater fulness in the Introduction to 2 Peter.

THE EPISTLE OF ST JUDE

"Judas, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied."—JUDE, 1, 2.

St. Jude follows the usual epistolary style of the age in alluding, first to himself, the writer of the letter, and then to those for whom it is intended; with a greeting from himself to them, a greeting that consists in the invocation of God's blessing upon them. Jude 1–2. The Greeting.

It is interesting to observe the terms in which he describes both himself and his readers. Of himself he says that he is a **servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.** St. James, in the opening words of his Epistle, uses the same word "servant" to indicate his relation to Jesus Christ. St. Paul, also, employs it at the beginning both of Romans and Philippians. The earliest followers of the Master evidently delighted to dwell on this relationship to Him. They probably derived the usage from the Old Testament. They read in its pages how the prophets were accustomed to call themselves the "servants" of God, and by the deliberate adoption of this usage they, not improbably, intended by implication to designate their Master as divine. Their relation to Him was analogous to that of the Old Testament prophet to God. The Greek word

Jude 1–2. translated " servant " really means " slave " and the margin of our R.V. suggests this by its general alternative " bond-servant ". Professor Mayor thinks it a mistake to translate the Greek word by " slave ", the " modern connotation of which ", he says, " is so different from that of the Greek word ". It may be that the slave of the first century A.D. was in a somewhat different position from that of the African negro slave, but there was one feature common to the positions of the two, and that was absolute ownership on the part of the Master. The slave was his master's property, possessed entirely by him. Just as the Old Testament prophet rejoiced to be simply the mouthpiece of God, through whom His word was spoken, so the follower of Jesus Christ rejoiced to be simply his Master's property, owned and used by Him. The service is absolute, but it is a willing service. In the Christian life the ideals of freedom and of service are realized and blended. " Our wills are ours, to make them Thine ".

It is perhaps not surprising to find St. Paul employing such a term. But it indicates a beautiful humility on the part both of St. James and St. Jude that neither of them lays stress on the fact that he was a brother of our Lord, but is glad to be enrolled as His " servant ". It enables us also to realize the unique position assigned to our Lord in these earliest days even by those who were His kinsfolk.

Those to whom the Epistle is sent are described as **called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.** To speak of Christians as " called " is another point of contact with the language of

St. Paul. By the " called " he means those who have heard the call and obeyed it, and St. Jude uses the term here in the same way. The expression emphasizes the thought of God's intervention in our lives. We sometimes use the word " calling " to mean the particular work we have chosen to do in life, the particular occupation we have selected to follow. But the word " calling " just like its equivalent " vocation " implies that we do not choose, but are chosen, we obey a call that comes to us. To obey the call of Christ is, in the fullest sense, to have a " vocation ", a vocation not simply to do some special work, but to live the whole of life to Him and for Him. The Christian vocation means not so much the doing of a thing as a general attitude of mind towards everything that we do. The spirit of one who has heard and obeyed the call of Jesus, must be simple, humble and sincere, both towards Him Who has called us and towards those amongst whom His service sends us. If to have been " called " by God is the supreme privilege of life, to " walk worthily of the calling " wherewith we are called is the highest obligation. God does much for us, but He requires something from us. He calls us, but ordains that we should " make our calling and election sure ". Jude 1–2.

God's side in this relationship is emphasized in the beautiful words that follow: " Beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ ". The interpretation of them presents difficulties and they are without exact parallels in the New Testament. But they seem to describe the " called " as those

Jude 1–2. who are in God and beloved by Him. Their life is hidden in Him and His loving care is constantly over them. And further they are "kept for Jesus Christ". The thought of Divine guardianship and protection here suggested is profoundly helpful and comforting. But here, too, the corresponding thought of obligation and responsibility must not be forgotten. St. Jude supplies it in verse 21, employing the same Greek verb: "Keep yourselves in the love of God". It is the paradox of true religion that while we depend wholly on God, we still must do our part. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you".

The last word of the following salutation, "love" recalls them to the thought that they are "beloved in God". With this are linked "mercy" and "peace", a combination used elsewhere, both by St. Paul and St. John. God's "love" is displayed in "mercy", and this is to the Christian the ground of "peace", the "peace of God which passeth all understanding", the guardian of his heart and thoughts in Jesus Christ.

"Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in privily, *even* they who were of old set forth unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."—JUDE, 3, 4.

Jude 3–4. St. Jude in these words sets forth his reasons for sending this short and strongly worded letter. He had been occupied with the project of writing to them a longer letter on the theme that was of

surpassing interest to them as well as to him, God's salvation of men through Christ. While he was still meditating on this great truth, news suddenly reached him that the Christians in whom he was interested were being threatened by a special danger, so serious as to brook no delay. He felt that he must write at once and do what he could to fortify them against the peril to which they were exposed. It was brought about by the entry into their midst of certain men who were pouring into their ears demoralizing doctrines. They were perverting the Pauline doctrine of God's free grace and of the Christians' freedom in Christ into a system of free unrestrained license. Their teaching and practice amounted to a denial, a complete repudiation of Christ. The inroad of such men, no true members of the flock, but destructive wolves let loose in its midst, had been foretold in ancient prophecy. St. Jude's object in writing now is to stir up his hearers to resistance ; to bid them strain every nerve to maintain the purity of the Gospel as they had received it, against these alien and degrading influences. Jude 3–4.

Such is the general drift of the explanation that he gives. Some of the phrases that he employs in it have a particular interest, and in one or two instances have passed into the general language of Christianity.

Take for instance the words **our common salvation.** Possibly we may infer from them that he is writing to Gentile readers of the salvation that embraces alike both himself, a Jew, and them of Gentile origin. The words then indicate with beautiful "Our Common Salvation."

Jude 3-4. simplicity the universality of the Gospel. They indicate, too, the essence of it; it is "salvation". And the salvation is "common" because the one universal need of humanity is to be saved. As Dr. McLaren points out, the word "to save" means either of two things—to heal from a sickness or to deliver from a danger. For mankind sin is the sickness and the issues of it are the danger, and from both of these God, in Christ, brings to us salvation. Any scheme for human welfare, however well meant, that ignores the fundamental fact will in the long run prove futile. Any project that deals simply with education or conditions of environment is superficial and ineffective. The universal trouble is that the heart is evil, and because it is evil it needs salvation from sickness and deliverance from danger. And the "common salvation" for the universal trouble is found in Christ Who deals with men at the very centre of their being. He brings to them forgiveness of sin and He frees them from the dominion of sin. He cleanses the stream by making pure the fountain head. And He saves mankind generally by saving its individual members. Here, again, let me quote Dr. McLaren's words. "If the units are corrupt the community cannot be pure. And the only way to make the units pure is that they shall have Christ on the Cross for their redemption, and Christ in the heart for their cleansing." And it is not only the "common" but the only Salvation. "In none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."

" The Faith once for all delivered "

The other phrase which may be said to have become classical is " the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints ". It has been used from time to time as the slogan, or battle cry, of men who have wished to resist what seemed to them to be innovation or perversion in Christian belief or practice. Is it justifiable to use the phrase in this way ? May it properly be used as Scriptural justification for a rigid all-round conservatism ? Does it really stand for the negation of progress and development ? **Jude 3-4.**

In order to answer such questions as these we must, on the one hand, interpret the phrase by its context ; that is, we must realize clearly what St. Jude was talking about when he used the words. We must also define what we mean when we talk about " progress " or " development " in connection with our Christian faith. Further, we must face this question : Provided that we see what St. Jude meant, are we prepared to subscribe to his words and make them ours ?

As we read the portion of the Epistle that follows these words we see clearly that St. Jude uses them with a practical reference. He is thinking, primarily, of life and conduct. Men had entered into the Church who were perverting the doctrine of Christian freedom into an excuse for absolute license. They were claiming to stand apart from the control of moral laws. St. Jude's fierce invective in the following passage depicts them as grossly impure, practising and inculcating on others the practice of the most degrading sensuality. As against such men and their teaching only one attitude was

Jude 3–4. possible. Any philosophic detachment, any speculative consideration of hedonism as a theory of life, and a tolerant treatment of its possibilities was sheer futile nonsense. St. Jude's view of the matter was that sin is sin, lust is lust, impurity is impurity and the teaching that audaciously tried to introduce these things under the guise of Christian teaching was to be met by uncompromising resistance. And surely he was right. No teaching that, in the name of Christian freedom, introduces laxity—especially such laxity as he depicts—merits tolerance, or even consideration. Against it the Christian must "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints".

What did he mean by **the faith**? Not primarily any set formula of articles of belief, but the substance that lay behind them—the Gospel—the truth proclaimed by the life and words of Jesus Christ, that God is our Father, that sin is the barrier that separates us from Him, that in Jesus Christ, His Son, He has provided for us redemption from sin and power to conquer it, and so eternal life in perfect communion with Himself. This is the "faith" or "Gospel" that has been given "once for all". No other will be given, for there is no other. The Christian Gospel is final and admits of neither successor nor supplement.

"The Saints".

And who are **the saints** to whom this Gospel "was once for all delivered"? They are Christians, generally, who are all consecrated and "called" to be holy. The word itself is a call to the brethren to contend strenuously against the teaching and

practice of the libertines. Men who are called to be holy, as God is holy, cannot tolerate or imitate any such practices as theirs. Against them they must " contend earnestly ". The word used suggests the energy and watchfulness of an athlete fighting in the arena. Jude 3-4.

Here, again, the side of human effort is emphasized. God has given us a great gift in the Gospel of His Son. But we must see, on our part, that the gift is neither lost nor corrupted. As St. Jude will show, by a series of examples that follow, it is possible that what God gives may be lost through our neglect. And, things being as they are, we can only keep it by fighting for it. That conviction underlies St. Paul's exhortation to Timothy: " Fight the good fight of the faith " as, also his description in the Epistle to the Ephesians of the Christian as a soldier, armed at every point, for conflict with spiritual adversaries.

If the question be asked: " How are we to ' fight ' in such a conflict as this ? What does the term precisely mean ? " St. Jude supplies the answer in words that come towards the end, in verses 20, 21. It is by the power of a life, builded up upon our " most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit ". That is the weapon with which we shall most effectually destroy any such influences as these early libertines were trying to introduce into the Church.

It remains to say a word on the question how far this expression of St. Jude's may be regarded as excluding the possibility of a " development " of Christian doctrine. The answer depends on what we mean by the word " development". If we mean

Jude 3–4. making additions to the original content of the Gospel with the idea that we are to supplement it or to remedy supposed deficiencies ; if we mean improving the original Gospel by supplying elements which it did not possess, and regard these elements as essential to the developing process, then the answer is, that in the sense supposed, there is not and there cannot be any " development " of Christian doctrine. If, on the other hand, we mean by " development " the fuller understanding of the great truths that were once for all given to men by Christ and His Apostles, a deeper and wider comprehension of their inexhaustible contents, then there is bound to be " development " of Christian doctrine. It is the fulfilment of our Lord's prophetic description of the Spirit's work: " He shall guide you into all the truth ".

But it was the strong, we might almost say, the passionate conviction of the Christians of the Apostolic age, that in Christ the absolute truth of God was fully revealed. Christ was understood to make no less a claim than this ; and therefore fuller knowledge of Him was progress in the knowledge of truth. Hence His further description of the Spirit's work: " He shall glorify Me : for he shall take of Mine and shall declare it unto you." For those who thought so, any form of progress that seemed either to move away from Christ, or to undervalue Him as the absolute Truth, was discredited and unacceptable. St. John expressed this conviction with emphasis in his Second Epistle: " Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not

God," and we see that it underlies St. Jude's other charge against the libertine intruders. Not only were they men of licentious lives ; they also denied " our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ ". The men of the Apostolic age were not prepared to tolerate any teaching that was at variance with the Truth revealed in Jesus ; much less would they tolerate such flagrant sensuality as that practised by these " ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ ". Jude 3–4.

These words not only express St. Jude's indignant horror of the men whose iniquities have caused him to write his letter ; they also introduce us to some of the literary problems that the study of the Epistle presents.

We come, for example, to one of the earliest traces of the Book of Enoch, from which St. Jude so largely draws. There are continual references in it to the grave sin of denying God. Such passages as the following are typical : " When the Righteous One shall appear . . . where will be the dwelling of the sinners and where the resting place of those who have denied the Lord of Spirits ? " " They will fall and not rise again . . . for they have denied the Lord of Spirits and His Anointed."

We also come, in this passage, to clear contact with the language of 2 Peter. From this point till the end of verse 16, the parallelism is close with the first eighteen verses of the second chapter of 2 Peter, and the student will do well to compare them carefully for himself, and to arrive, if he can, at a decision on

Jude 3–4. the difficult question of literary dependence. Which of the two writers is the earlier, and which is making use of the work of the other? There is no absolute criterion. Critics of eminence come to diametrically opposite opinions. The late Dr. Bigg, for example, goes through St. Jude, marking the points of contact with 2 Peter, showing in repeated instances how 2 Peter is earlier and original, while St. Jude has copied, and sometimes spoiled in copying, the earlier writing. On the other hand Professor Mayor says: "The impression which they leave on my mind is that in Jude we have the first thought, in 2 Peter the second thought; that we can generally see a reason why 2 Peter should have altered Jude, but very rarely a reason why what we read in 2 Peter should have been altered to what we find in Jude. 2 Peter is more reflective, Jude more spontaneous." We have already spoken about this in the Introduction to 2 Peter. Here it may suffice to say that more recent scholars appear to be supporting the view of Professor Mayor.

In the passage before us we find that the corresponding passage in 2 Peter has "false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that brought them", making the words refer to Christ, and heightening the horror of the denial by a reference to His self-sacrifice on their behalf.

This reference to Christ introduces us to one more problem about the words before us. Does St. Jude charge the false teachers with denying both God and Christ, or does he charge them only with denying

Christ? The A.V., in its rendering, supports the former view. "Denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Jude 3-4.

The R.V. takes the latter: "denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." The difficulty is that in every other New Testament passage, except this parallel one in 2 Peter, the Greek word translated "Master" is applied to God the Father. But we need hardly suppose that there was any hard and fast rule about this. It may have been St. Jude's way, as Deissmann suggests in his *Light from the Ancient East*, of emphasizing the conviction that Christ is the one and only Lord, a title to be shared by no other. We may be content, then, to accept the rendering of the R.V. If we are right in supposing that 2 Peter used this passage, then he certainly applied the words in this way.

"Now I desire to put you in remembrance, though ye know all things once for all, how that the Lord having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgement of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornication, and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire."—JUDE, 5-7.

St. Jude has already said that the faith was delivered "once for all" to the Saints, that is, to the general body of professed Christian believers. He assumes correspondingly that his readers "know all things once for all". It is therefore his task now not to tell them anything new, but to recall to them what they already know—to put them "in remem- Jude 5-7.

Jude 5–7.

brance " of what they have heard; and, further, to point for them the very grave moral that should be drawn.

The moral on which he desires to insist is that God may bestow very high privilege upon His creatures; but the bestowal is not absolute and unconditioned. Instances stand on record in Scripture and elsewhere of the privilege being forfeited and completely lost with most disastrous consequences to the unworthy despisers.

Israel in the Wilderness.

St. Jude cites three examples of the Divine Wrath on those who sinned after receiving favours from God. Firstly, the Israelites who perished in the wilderness for unbelief after they had been saved from Egypt. It will be remembered how St. Paul in 1 Corinthians x. dwells on this, enumerating in detail the privileges in which all Israel shared, and concluding with the words: " Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness ". The story of Israel in the wilderness was a conspicuous narrative of Divine punishment for neglected privilege.

The Angels who Sinned.

Secondly, the angels who abandoned their original office and habitation, being led away by fleshy lusts, and are now kept in chains under darkness till the day of Judgement. This story of the fall of the angels is taken directly from the Book of Enoch, which is itself an expansion of the curious story in Genesis vi. 1–4 of the taking to wife of the daughters of men by the sons of God, or as the Septuagint version of the passage puts it, by the angels. How the story was enlarged by the apocalyptic writer may be seen

by reading the narrative in Enoch, chapters vi. to x. Jude 5–7. It has been suggested that this apocalyptic enlargement is coloured by reminiscences of two passages in Isaiah: the King of Babylon's entrance into Hades in chapter xiv. and the punishment of guardian angels for neglect of their duty in chapter xxiv., and the general resemblance is certainly striking.

The main drift of the narrative and the specific warning that it conveyed for St. Jude's readers are clear. The angels had a lofty habitation in heaven; they had a high vocation—to be God's chosen Watchers. From both their abode and their vocation they were drawn away to sensuality on the earth, in punishment for which they are in bondage till the day of Judgement. The picturesque detail of the "everlasting bonds" is taken from Enoch. In chapter liv. we read: "I saw how they made iron chains of immeasurable weight, and I asked for whom they were prepared, and he said unto me 'These are prepared for the hosts of Azazel'".

Thirdly, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. These too had had their privileges. They had had a land like the garden of the Lord. They had been rescued from foreign onslaught by Abraham. But they, like the angels, fell with sensuality; their degradation was unspeakable, and they too are suffering the punishment of eternal fire. The desolate region where once Sodom and Gomorrah has stood was regarded by the Jews as a perpetual memorial of God's wrath on those "to whose wickedness a smoking plain still witnesseth" (Wisdom x. 7). Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jude 5–7. Yielding to sensual excess was one of the ways in which Israel in the wilderness showed its apostasy from God. In the case of the angels and of the inhabitants of the cities of the Plain it is depicted as their grave offence. It may be that St. Jude selected these three instances of privilege so forfeited because the temptation to which his readers were exposed through the influence of the libertines, was of this kind too. He wished to convince them by the most impressive examples possible that wild indulgence in fleshy sin can drag down and destroy even those who have been most richly gifted and consign them to " everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgement of the great day ".

Is not the grave warning that his words convey very directly applicable to our own age ? We live in a time of unrest, when many of the restrictions of an earlier day are treated with a good-humoured contempt, and are too often lightly cast aside. It is a significant fact of dreadful omen that proposals have to be made in Parliament to limit drastically the publication in the Press of reports of trials concerned with violations of the law of marriage. These reports are too often records of impurity of the most defiling and degrading kind. They betray a mode of life in which the sanctions of religion are frankly trampled underfoot. They are symptoms of that spirit of wild unrestrained license which erects the gratification of our lower animal passions into a theory of life " turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ ".

Dreamers

"Yet in like manner these also in their dreamings defile the flesh, and set at nought dominion, and rail at dignities. But Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing Judgement, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these rail at whatsoever thing they know not: and what they understand naturally, like the creatures without reason, in these things are they destroyed."—JUDE, 8–10.

In the preceding passage St. Jude has enumerated three awe-inspiring examples of Divine punishment inflicted on gross sin, examples including in their scope both Jews, Gentiles and angelic beings. He now proceeds to apply these examples to the libertines of his own day about whom he is writing; by the scandalous conduct they are displaying and trying to persuade others to imitate, they are provoking God to punish them in the same way. Jude 8–10.

These wicked teachers, in fact, were guilty of gross impurity and of wild insubordination. They not only revelled in the gratification of their animal passions, but they laughed at the idea of obedience to any higher authority. In itself this was not strange, because the spirit of impurity and that of contempt for authority are obviously most closely allied.

In so thinking and in so acting they were **dreamers.** They were like the men of whom Isaiah (lvi, 10) spoke: "Dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber". They were oblivious to all sense of decency and duty. They were sunk in the torpor of sin. They were dead to, out of all relations with, the true realities of life, and in the false dream world in which they lived, they not only did deeds of debasing impurity, but scoffed at every form of higher authority.

Jude 8–10. This would seem to be the general meaning of St. Jude's description of them. When we look more closely into the details of it and consider the explanations of earlier interpreters we find that there has been considerable difference of opinion as to the precise import of the terms "dominion" and "dignities". It seems, on the whole, most probable that both terms refer to powers of the supernatural world than to human officials, to the angelic world rather than to that of humanity.

The first clause presents no difficulty. They **defile the flesh** means, just as the earlier words "turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness" meant that they were guilty of sins of impurity. **Set at naught dominion** or "lordships" perhaps also finds its explanation in the earlier words "denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ". The word, however, that is translated "dominion was one that had a particular meaning in the language of the later Jews about angels. It may refer to a particular rank of beings in the hierarchy of angels. If we interpret the word with this reference, we shall regard it, as we are most probably right, in regarding the following term "dignities" as referring to beings of the angelic world. This latter term most fitly introduces the episode contained in the following words. There may also be an implied reference to the sinners of Sodom already mentioned. The narrative in Genesis tells how they combined the vilest lusts with impious irreverence towards God's angelic messengers who were sent to them. So regarded, the word "dignities" is a connecting link

between what St. Jude has already said and what he now goes on to say. Jude 8–10.

He tells the story of Michael the archangel contending with the devil about the body of Moses, and calls attention to the fact that, when so contending, he uttered no word of railing, but simply made his appeal to God. The moral that he wishes to draw is obvious. The profane libertines, against whom he is writing, speak of angelic "dignities" in a way that even an archangel did not venture to adopt in rebuking Satan. It is a strong instance of the *a fortiori* argument. If one of the highest beings in the angelic world, even when rebuking the prince of evil, did not venture to use railing words, how much more intolerable was it that sin-stained mortals should use such words in speaking of angelic beings with their divinely bestowed authority.

It may be taken as generally agreed that St. Jude derives this story of the strife between Michael and the devil about the body of Moses from an apocryphal work, *The Assumption of Moses*. The legend which this work contains is built up on the Biblical language of Deut. xxxiv. 6: "He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day". This brief and impressive statement is elaborated by the apocryphal writer into the following details. Michael the archangel was commissioned by God to bury Moses. Satan appeared and opposed his burial on two grounds. In the first place he claimed that he was lord of the material world and therefore he claimed that the body should be given to him. To this

Jude 8–10. Michael answered: "The Lord rebuke thee, for it was God's spirit that created the world and all mankind." In the second place Satan charged Moses with murder, referring to his slaying of the Egyptian (Exodus ii. 12). The answer made by the archangel to this charge is not recorded.

The story as a whole illustrates the way in which the pious imagination worked upon a simple statement of Scripture. Some of the details are drawn from later Jewish angelology; others depend on actual words of Scripture. The Book of Enoch, for example, tells us that there are seven archangels and gives the names of them all, one of which names is Michael. The word "archangel" loomed largely in Jewish doctrine about the spirit world. In the New Testament it only occurs in one other place, 1 Thessalonians iv. 16, where St. Paul speaks of "the voice of the archangel" and "the trump of God" in connection with the descent of the Lord from heaven. The detailed imagery of this passage is drawn from Jewish apocalyptic writings and it is interesting to observe that St. Paul and St. Jude alike drew from these writings and probably presupposed some acquaintance with them on the part of their readers.

The words that are put into the lips of the archangel are taken from Zechariah iii. 2, where the angel of the Lord replies to the charges of Satan against the high priest Joshua with the words: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan".

It is just possible that some devout readers of the New Testament, anxious to stand for the fullest

conception of the inspiration of Scripture may be perplexed at this use of apocryphal legend by St. Jude. The view may be advanced, of course, that he merely uses it in an illustrative way to make his meaning clear. But this is hardly likely. There is every reason to suppose that he believed the story about the dispute between Michael and Satan to be true. The better course is to maintain our belief that the writers of Holy Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, but to refrain from over-dogmatism about the way in which His Spirit works. It is a mistake to form our own ideas about the way in which He *must* work. It by no means follows that the Spirit actually works in the way that we suppose. It is our business by reverent reading and careful research to discover the method of the Spirit's actual working ; and if need be we must adjust our ideas to what we find. We neither honour God nor help our fellow men if we try to twist what we may discover about His ways into conformity with our own preconceived notions of what is right. **Jude 8–10.**

In the concluding words of our passage St. Jude points the contrast between the behaviour of the archangel and that of the libertines. The archangel showed respect even to the Prince of Evil. They lightly rail about that world of spiritual authority about which they know absolutely nothing. Their only knowledge is of their passions, those instincts and impulses which we share with the animal creation. Those who mock at the higher things of the Spirit, and frankly surrender themselves to the gratification of the appetites of the body, sink to the level of the

Jude 8–10. animal world. They forfeit their spiritual standing and their spiritual destiny. **In these things,** that is in the passions to the gratification of which they devote themselves, **are they destroyed.**

> **"Woe unto them! for they went in the way of Cain, and ran riotously in the error of Baalam for hire, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah. These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts when they feast with you, shepherds that without fear feed themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved for ever."**—JUDE, 11–13.

Jude 11–13. St. Jude has not yet exhausted his denunciation of the false teachers. He goes on to compare them, in their soul-destroying influence, with three men who stand out prominently in the pages of Old Testament Scripture as examples of error coupled with disaster, Cain, Balaam and Korah.

He resumes the note of condemnation in the phrase **Woe unto them!** which was common in the Book of Enoch and was employed by our Lord with such awe-inspiring effect in His denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees. The "woe" that he predicts is grounded on the fate that awaits those who walk in the steps of these sinners of the ancient world.

Cain stands out as a sinister figure in the Old Testament record. Jewish writers portrayed him as a prototype of cynicism and selfishness. St. John in his First Epistle depicts him as a type of jealous hate: "Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother". By the author of Hebrews he is instanced as an example of unbelief: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain".

The combination of these faults in Cain, disbelief in God and lack of brotherly love, issued in his being the world's first murderer; and this perhaps is the chief thought in St. Jude's mind when he compares the false teachers with him. They, by their teaching and example, murder the souls of men. Jude 11–13.

Balaam, too, stands out prominently in Scripture as a dreadful warning. St. Jude's description of him is very brief and the exact interpretation of his words in the original Greek is not an easy matter. If we keep to the rendering of the R.V. the verb applied to the libertine teachers "ran riotously" seems to express the onward sweeping movement of a crowd that rushes along, defiant of all obstacles, deaf to reason and expostulation. In this violent and headstrong way these teachers followed in the way of Balaam. According to the presentment of him in Scripture if we combine the passages in which he is described, he went wrong because he allowed himself to hanker after gain and so lost his communion with God, and that in spite of the various ways in which God intervened to save him. And not only did he go wrong himself, but he abused his influence as a prophet to lead Israel astray also. He drew them away from the pure worship of Jehovah to the impure orgies of Baal-peor. 2 Peter also refers to Balaam and lays special emphasis on covetousness as the root of his wrong doing. St. Jude merely mentions this in passing; his main verb **ran riotously** is intended to suggest more vividly the sin into which Balaam is said to have seduced Israel, the gross sensuality of the idolatrous worship. The moral Balaam.

Jude 11–13. impurity that accompanied the false teaching was the object of his gravest censure.

Korah. The sin of Korah was that of wilful rebellion against divinely constituted authority. The sixteenth chapter of Numbers tells the story of the penalty that was inflicted upon it. St. Jude, by adducing this, clearly seems to imply that the men whom he is denouncing were not only immoral but insubordinate. They defied the authority of the Church and claimed the right to make rules for themselves. They demanded liberty, and by liberty they meant license, license to revel in sensuality. The question of the right to revolt against a constituted authority is not an easy one to settle ; much depends on the nature of the authority and on the way in which it is exercised. But revolt with this object in view, to cast off any restrictions that would prohibit the wildest excess, has no shadow of justification. The fate of those who enter on it will be that of Korah and his associates of whom Scripture says, " they perished ".

St. Jude has now ended his series of Old Testament parallels to the libertine teachers, but he has not yet completely emptied upon them the vials of his righteous wrath. He goes on to portray their evil character and their disastrous influence.

It is interesting to observe that the form in which he expresses his denunciations is still that of the apocalyptic literature, for which he would seem to have had an especial liking. The reiterated " These are " which comes in verses 12, 16 and 19, is a familiar expression in these writings. It will be observed, too, that after each of these clauses, there

is an adversative one, pointing to something that may be said on the other side, and introduced by the word "But". In the first of these in verse 14 the Revisers prefer the translation "And", although the Greek word can equally well mean "But", and more probably does so. The other two instances come in verses 17 and 20. Jude 11–13.

It is with the first portion of his threefold denunciation that we are now concerned. In a swift series of images drawn from the world of nature he depicts those features which seem to be wild, tempestuous, destructive and disappointing; and he declares that all these features represent the true character of the libertine teachers.

For the student who reads the passage in the Greek, there are problems to be faced, both of reading and of interpretation, and the investigation of these problems has called for the most recondite research on the part of able and highly skilled commentators. It will suffice for us here to take the translation given in our English Revised Version and do our best to realize the meaning of that, with such allusion as may be necessary to disputed words and alternative renderings.

The English reader who follows the quick onrush of the successive clauses, with their wealth of imagery and their vigorous diction, cannot fail to be impressed by the vehement zeal of St. Jude and by the crushing, almost stunning weight of the hammer blows which he inflicts, until we come to the final stroke of the awe-inspiring climax, "for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved for ever".

Jude 11–13. **These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts when they feast with you.** Many problems cluster round the phrase **hidden rocks.** It is a question whether the Greek word means "rocks" or "spots". A word, bearing some resemblance to this one, is used in 2 Peter which certainly means "spots" and the margin of the R.V. gives "spots" as an alternative translation here.

But the Revisers seem to have ample support from ancient lexicography, in taking it to mean "rocks" though their insertion of the adjective "hidden" has been disputed. Support, however, for this particular meaning of "hidden rocks" is not wanting in ancient literature, and it may certainly be claimed that it admirably suits the context. St. Jude apparently means to say that these teachers insinuate themselves into the most intimate gatherings of Christians, professing to be jealous upholders of the faith, and yet having designs in their hearts, the carrying out of which will work havoc among the Christian brethren. What more appropriate figure could he draw from the natural world than that of sunken reefs, which are not seen above the surface of the water, but will inevitably wreck the ship that may happen to strike upon them ?

The "love-feast" was a simple meal in which all met as equals, and at which the richer members were supposed to supply the necessities of their poorer brethren. It symbolized the brotherhood of Christians. When St. Jude wrote, the Eucharist was still part of the "love-feast" as it was when St. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. The connection

between the two seems to have been maintained till the days of Ignatius, early in the second century, but separation took place before the time of Justin Martyr, about the middle of the century. We may say then that it was the love-feast accompanied by the Eucharist that was profaned by the presence and possibly by the excesses of the libertines. St. Jude seems to use the phrase " when they feast with you " in a way that implies censure. Possibly they turned what ought to have been a simple religious meal into something more like a riotous orgy. Possibly, too, they drew apart from the simpler and poorer brethren, to feast with greater plenty of food and drink. This seems to be suggested by the words that follow. **Shepherds that without fear feed themselves.** Jude 11–13.

This further description recalls most readily to the mind the prophet Ezekiel's denunciation of the shepherds of Israel who " fed themselves and fed not My sheep ". If St. Jude's meaning is that the false teachers fed themselves instead of feeding the flock, the rendering of the R.V. will serve to express it ; but there is the possibility that the meaning may be that they pastured, or fed themselves without waiting to be fed by the shepherds of the flock. The literal rendering of the Greek is " shepherding themselves without fear " and this may simply continue the thought of the previous words and state that they were generally, and especially in the Christian love-feasts, selfish and disorderly. They trampled brotherhood underfoot and despised the ministrations of the duly appointed shepherds.

Jude 11–13. **Clouds without water, carried along by winds.** In the swift torrent of his indignation and abhorrence St. Jude pours out figure after figure taken successively from the air, the earth, the sea, and the upper heaven. He wishes, in the first place, to describe how ineffective for good these libertines are, how utterly disappointing. When clouds appear in the sky the Oriental farmer or traveller looks eagerly to them for refreshing rain ; it is their beneficent mission to pour moisture on the parched earth. But if the cloud is swept by the wind across the sky, without giving to the earth a drop of rain, the anxious watcher is cheated of his hope. These false teachers were, doubtless, ostentatious and pretentious. It may have seemed at first that their coming would bring strength and refreshment to the Church. In point of fact they were as useless as clouds that give no water are to the thirsty earth beneath. An Eastern could find no stronger figure to portray such disappointed hopes. The writer in Proverbs xxv. 14, had expressed it similarly long before : " As clouds and wind without rain, so is he that boasteth himself of his gifts falsely ".

Autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. This figure, too, serves to heighten the sense of futility and disappointment. The Greek words mean literally " autumn-withering trees ", that is, trees which, just at the season when fruit is expected, wither and are fruitless. St. Jude may perhaps have had in his mind a recollection of our Lord's parable of the barren fig-tree, which conveys the same idea of legitimate expectation

unfulfilled. But he presses still further his figure of the unfruitful tree. The libertines are not merely dead; they are twice dead. They were dead once in trespasses and sins. From that death they were raised by the redeeming power of Christ. Now, by their apostasy from Him they have died again. Just as trees that are not only withered but have been torn up by the roots, may be called twice dead, so these apostate teachers who have been parted from Him Who is their life-giving root are twice dead, dead indeed. Jude 11–13.

Wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame;

The first two of St. Jude's figures, the hidden reef and the clouds, referred to the specious professions of the libertines and the disaster that they caused. The third, that of the dead trees, referred to their own wretched condition of spiritual deadness. The two that follow now, describe in magnificent and impressive imagery, their lawlessness and shamelessness and their impending fate. The fine figure of the foaming sea waves, is possibly remembered by St. Jude from Isaiah lvii. 20. "The wicked are like the troubled sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt". The reference is to the seaweed and other refuse borne on the crest of the waves and thrown up on the beach by incoming waves. So are the libertines with their "swelling words" and their accompanying "lasciviousness". They are like the great rollers that break in foam and leave upon the beach the tangled mass of refuse they have borne ashore.

Jude 11–13. **Wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved for ever.** This final and most awe-inspiring figure is taken by St. Jude from the Book of Enoch, and his meaning must be determined by a reference to that work. He probably alludes neither to planets nor to comets, but to "falling stars" or "shooting stars", which seem to the watcher to leave their place in heaven and wander away into the darkness. In Enoch there is a connection between the stars and the angels. The seer was permitted to gaze upon a place which "until the consummation of heaven and earth will be the prison of the stars and the host of heaven". Stars and angels alike were regarded as having their path prescribed by God and those who forsook the appointed path were punished in the blackness of eternal darkness.

"And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgement upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."—JUDE 14, 15.

Jude 14–15. In his comparison of the libertine teachers with wandering stars, condemned by God to the blackness of darkness, St. Jude was drawing, as we have seen, on the ideas of the Book of Enoch. He now goes on to quote a prophecy of Divine judgement directly from that book, with the declaration that the prophecy, though uttered in such remote antiquity applied directly to the libertines, and would find its fulfilment in the doom that was coming upon them.

Enoch. Enoch is nowhere else in Scripture designated as the "seventh" from Adam. If, however, the

inclusive Hebrew method of counting be applied to the genealogical list in Genesis v. 4–24, it will be seen that he occupied that place, and the sacredness with which the Jews invested the number seven may have led them to lay special stress on this point in connection with him. It is probably from the Book of Enoch itself that St. Jude draws the expression, because in it the writer says "I was born the seventh in the first week". Jude 14–15.

The words quoted by St. Jude are combined from two separate passages in Enoch, the first of them in i. 9: "And, lo, He comes with ten thousand of His holy ones to execute judgment upon them; and He will destroy the ungodly, and will convict all flesh of all that the sinners and ungodly have wrought and ungodly committed against Him." The second is in v. 4: "Ye have slanderously spoken proud and hard words with your impure mouths against His greatness."

The words are an impressive prophecy of coming judgement, and St. Jude who, as we may suppose, regarded them as a genuine prophecy of Enoch could find no better means of depicting the Divine Judgement that was coming on the libertines. They had sinned in the same way that those beings of an earlier day, about whom Enoch wrote, had sinned; and the fate of which the early patriarch spoke would come also upon them.

The whole subject of the apocalyptic literature to which the Book of Enoch belongs is full of the deepest interest. The reader who wishes for fuller information should procure the little book on the The Apocalyptic Books.

Jude 14–15. subject by Professor Andrews,[1] *The Apocryphal Books of the Old and New Testament*, which is a veritable mine of valuable information arranged in clear and attractive form. He will then learn at greater length how the Apocalyptic succeeded to the Prophetic literature ; how the various writers who contributed to it, trusting in God, and yet grievously perplexed by the cruel persecutions they were called on to suffer, turned their eyes from earth to heaven, from the present to the future, and dwelt on the thought that in His own time God would intervene in this disordered world to punish wickedness and vindicate the righteous. The thoughts which they had to declare might draw upon their heads the resentment of the ruling powers ; hence they veiled what they had to say in figure and in symbol, which sometimes seem to a modern reader fantastic and grotesque. It was partly for this reason, and partly because they did not wish to appear as making additions, in their own names, to the revelation of God vouchsafed in the Law that they adopted the names of heroes of the past, Enoch, Baruch, Moses, Isaiah and others.

The Book of Enoch, on which St. Jude so greatly depends, is a composite document—it might almost be called a library rather than a volume—including five different Apocalypses, extending in date from about 170 B.C. to 64 B.C. It deals with such problems as the beginnings of sin, the doom of the wicked and the ultimate destiny of the righteous, and it is

[1] In the *Century Bible Handbooks* Series (T. C. and E. C. Jack).

to these portions that St. Jude is chiefly indebted. Jude 14–15.
The portion of the work known as the " Similitudes " is also of the greatest interest because of its use of the term " The Son of Man " and its portrayal of the Messiah as sitting on " the throne of glory " for the judgement of the world. The other apocalyptic work used by St. Jude, the *Assumption of Moses*, was written somewhat later, in the reign of Herod the Great. It sketches the previous history of God's people, and foretells the coming of perilous times of persecution, from which, however, the people will ultimately be delivered.

The apocalyptic literature as a whole is a fascinating study for the reader of the New Testament Scriptures. It enables him to realize better the historical and literary background of those Scriptures. He will realize, too, much more fully the Divine preparation for the coming of our Lord and will understand better the language in which both our Lord and His Apostles communicated their message to the men of their age.

It is only in comparatively recent times that the contents of this literature have been made available for ordinary English readers. Those who have access to a good library will be able to consult the Oxford *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* edited by Dr. Charles. But many of the separate books have been published in cheap and convenient form by the S.P.C.K. in their *Translations of Early Documents*, and so are easily available for the English reader.

" These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their lusts (and their mouth speaketh great swelling *words*), showing

respect of persons for the sake of advantages. But ye, beloved, remember ye the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they said to you, In the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts."—JUDE, 16–18.

Jude 16–18. St. Jude has still a few more things to say in reproof of the libertines, in order, perhaps, to show how ripe they are for the inflection of God's judgement. They are **murmurers.** This particular word only occurs here in the Greek New Testament. But in the Greek Old Testament the corresponding verb is used of the Israelites who murmured against God and Moses and St. Jude may be wishing to point out how those against whom he writes are similarly guilty of rebellious discontent. They were insubordinate and turbulent elements in the Christian community. They are also, he says, **complainers.** This word, too, like "murmurers" is peculiar to this passage, and probably carries on the idea of insubordination.

There is, indeed, an alternative way of interpreting the words. The concluding words of the prophecy of Enoch just quoted, allude to "the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him". If St. Jude is carrying on the thought of Enoch in his own words he may mean to imply that the libertines also speak "hard things" against God in murmuring against His decrees and complaining of the dispensations of His providence. Whether they do this in a general way, or, more particularly, by rebelling against the ordered life of the Christian community of which they profess to be members, the root of the trouble, in either case, lies in the fact

that they walk **after their own lusts.** It is this deliberate choice of the lower rather than the higher; this yielding to the insatiable demands of their animal nature and audaciously erecting this yielding into a principle of life that makes them "murmurers" and "complainers". Jude 16–18.

But they did not only murmur and complain. **Their mouth speaketh great swelling words.** It seems not improbable that this phrase is derived by St. Jude from apocalyptic literature, though its exact origin is not certain. In Enoch (ci. 3) we have the words: "Ye have spoken insolent words against His righteousness." On the other hand there is a more exact parallel in the *Assumption of Moses* (vii. 21): "Their mouth speaketh great things."

The apocalyptic writers evidently regarded high sounding insolent language about God and His providence as one of the chief marks of the sinners about whom they wrote and St. Jude adopts their words to portray the libertine disturbers of the Church.

It may be noted that the phrase occurs also in 2 Peter ii. 18, and that the writer there seems to interpret the "great swelling words" as referring to the teaching of the libertines that Christian liberty included the freedom to gratify one's own desires, "turning," as St. Jude has already said, "the grace of God into lasciviousness." The words in 2 Peter are clear and emphatic: "For, uttering great swelling *words* of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error; promising

Jude 16–18. them liberty, while they themselves are bond-servants of corruption."

Shewing respect of persons for the sake of advantage. In these words St. Jude repeats the charge, at which he had already hinted in verse 11, of covetousness against the false teachers. The suggestion seems to be that though they could speak high swelling words against God, on behalf of their own unbounded licence, yet when it came to a matter of obtaining some gift or remuneration from the more wealthy and powerful they could become most humble and subservient in demeanour. Some have seen in the words also a more particular reference to the sin of Balaam and an assertion that the greed of the libertines was a reproduction of his.

"Remember."

But ye, beloved, remember ye the words which have been spoken before by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; St. Jude here, as again in verse 20, turns to the faithful members of the Church. In his appeal to them, he no longer quotes words of prophecy that purport to come from the primaeval world, but reminds them of prophetic words spoken by the Apostles of Christ themselves. They also had foreseen that these troublous times were bound to come upon the faithful. By his reference to them as **the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ** it is generally held that St. Jude distinguishes himself, personally, from them and indicates that he was not one of the original Apostolic band.

How that they said to you, In the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts.

From the particular form of the Greek word translated "they said" we may infer that the warning was spoken, not written, and also that it was often repeated. Those who hold that 2 Peter was written before Jude not unnaturally find in 2 Peter iii. 3 the prophecy to which St. Jude is referring: "In the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming?" It should be observed however that 2 Peter, in the immediately preceding words, refers the prophecy back to an earlier authority: "Remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles." As we compare these words with those before us of St. Jude, and assume that there is literary connection between the two passages, the inevitable alternative seems to be that either 2 Peter has enlarged and made more complicated the words of St. Jude, or that St. Jude has considerably simplified those of 2 Peter. In view of all the other considerations that have to be weighed the former supposition appears to be more probable, that St. Jude's is the original passage and that 2 Peter has amplified it and given it a specially pointed application. Jude 16–18.

The exact words of the prophecy to which reference is made have not come down to us, but in more passages than one the substance of them is contained. For example, St. Paul in parting from the Ephesian elders at Miletus, said: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you,

Jude 16–18. not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." In the Pastoral Epistles, too, clear reference is made to the coming of evil days: "The Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies." (1 Tim. iv. 1, 2). The long passage in 2 Tim. iii. 1–8 opening with the declaration that "in the last days grievous times shall come" should also be carefully studied. In the vigour of its detailed denunciation it resembles to some extent the invective of St. Jude. These, and other passages that might be quoted, make it clear that inspired teachers had, from the beginning, foreseen that in the days that lay ahead the presence of wicked and demoralizing teachers would be one of the greatest dangers to which the life of the Church would be exposed.

If we ask, in what sense these libertines were **mockers,** that is, what were the objects at which their mockery was aimed, we may say that inasmuch as they (in St. Jude's words) turned "the grace of our God into lasciviousness" they would probably mock at those who obeyed more strictly and literally God's commands as to rigid purity of life. And if they so denied God and Christ they would probably scoff at the idea of a coming judgement. It is significant that 2 Peter distinctly associates their mockery with this latter point. Their frivolous scoffing was the outcome and the accompaniment of their degraded life, "walking after their own ungodly lusts."

Divisions in the Church

"These are they who make separations, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."—JUDE, 19–21.

In these words we come to the last of the three passages, beginning with the words, "These are . . ." in which St. Jude, with energetic invective, denounces the libertine teachers. The two former passages were in verses 12 and 16. **Jude 19–21.**

These are they who make separations. St. Jude does not say that they actually separate themselves. The A.V. in so translating it, is following a wrong reading in the Greek. He uses the present participle of the Greek verb, a usage which implies continued action. The libertines are those who "are separating"; they habitually are making separations or differences. He does not represent them as making a schism *from* the Church, for apparently they continued to attend its meetings. But apparently they created an atmosphere of division within it. St. Jude is probably again alluding to what he had already hinted at in verse 12, the disintegrating effect of their selfish conduct in the Christian love-feasts. He may also have in mind what he has said in verse 16 about their pandering, for the sake of gain, to wealthier people. There was, too, a real element of division in their distinctive teaching, that the truly intellectual and enlightened person could laugh at older and stricter views, and could turn the accepted principles of Christian life upside down. Such teaching would obviously split the Church from top to bottom. St. Paul describes the disruptive

Jude 19–21. effect of it in the closing words of the Epistle to the Romans (xvi. 17, 18), and also in Philippians iii. 18, 19. He knew the harm done by men, who while professing superior intellectual enlightenment, lived lives of self-indulgence and so perverted the freedom of which they boasted to utter degradation of life.

These men not only tend to produce divisions in the Church, but they are **sensual.** St. Jude shares this expression with St. Paul, possibly borrows it from him. In the second chapter of 1 Corinthians St. Paul draws a distinction between the "natural" man and the "spiritual" and the word he uses for the former is the one that is here translated "sensual". It indicates broadly those whose lives are dominated by their feelings, impulses, passions; who know little of self-control at the bidding of a higher spiritual principle; in whose lives that higher element which we describe as "spiritual" is completely wanting. They may be brilliantly clever, or they may be wantonly self-indulgent, or they may combine these features, but "spiritual" in the sense of submitting themselves to the guiding control of God's Holy Spirit, they are not. In fact they may be described as **having not the Spirit.** This means that they are so overcome by their body and their sensual nature, so steeped in bodily indulgence and intellectual self-sufficiency, that they are entirely disobedient to the higher dictates of the Spirit. And not only so, but their power of spiritual insight is gone. What perception and appreciation of the spiritual world they ever had is destroyed, and with it their desire for and capacity for communion with God. When

we think of all it means for the life of man to recognize and to submit to the Holy Spirit of God, we realize that St. Jude has reached the ultimate point in describing the abandoned condition of these libertines when he speaks of them as " not having the Spirit ". Jude 19-21.

And now, at last, the stream of fiery denunciation has come to an end. The threefold description of the evil-doers has exhausted the torrents of his scathing invective, and he turns from them to the other members of the Church—those for whose welfare he is so supremely concerned. These he addresses in tones of kindliest affection, with loving exhortation to continuance in consistent Christian life. The remainder of the Epistle is in this gentler vein.

If we look at his admonition from the point of view of its grammatical construction we see that it centres in one main counsel: **Keep yourselves in the love of God.** The two preceding participial clauses tell us *how* this command is to be obeyed, what the Christian himself must do, if he would hope to keep it; **building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.** The concluding participial clause, **looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life**, speaks of what will be at once the accompaniment and the further outcome of keeping ourselves **in the love of God.**

Keep yourselves in the love of God. We have already spoken of the perpetual paradox of the religious life that meets us in these words. In the opening salutation, St. Jude described his readers as " kept for Jesus Christ ". He spoke there of the

Jude 19–21. embracing, sustaining love of God by which the Christian believer is kept. His words are a Christian version of the ancient saying "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms". There is one thing, and one only, that can withdraw us from the protection of those arms, and that is our own perverse will. All the infinite resources of the Divine Strength are available for our need, if only we will ask for them and stay upon them. We cannot make God cease to love us, but we can, in a way, by deliberate persistence in evil, withdraw ourselves from the enjoyment of His love. And so St. Jude entreats his readers to "keep" themselves "in the love of God". To do so is to dwell in the impregnable stronghold which no assault of evil can touch, guarded by "the peace of God which passeth all understanding".

And how are we so to "keep" ourselves "in the love of God"? Firstly, says St. Jude, by **building up yourselves on your most holy faith.** The "faith" here means that "faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" the Gospel, the truth as it is in Jesus. The figure of building as applied to the Christian life was a favourite one with St. Paul, and this is another instance in which St. Jude echoes his thought. St. Paul varies the figure in details. He speaks of Jesus Christ, sometimes, as the foundation; sometimes, as the corner stone. In one place he applies it to the Church, the Christian Society, which he compares to a holy temple, in which Christians are the separate stones. In another he seems to apply it to the individual Christian life,

when he speaks of Christians as " rooted and builded up in Him ". The figure conveys to us the thoughts of growth and progress. The faith on which the building rests is the foundation, the indispensable groundwork and basis. But a foundation implies a building and the building must be erected course by course until the top stone is reached. Without the foundation it could never stand; but resting on the foundation it can weather every storm. To erect it, effort must be expended, and the work must be continuous till the building is complete. It is no slight task to which St. Jude calls his readers, " building up yourselves on your most holy faith." It would indeed be a task beyond our powers, if the doing of it were not accompanied by the other thing to which he calls them. Jude 19–21.

Praying in the Holy Spirit. Although we *must* build, we are not strong enough to build ourselves. We must pray to God for help. And, often, we are too weak either to build strongly or to pray rightly. But " the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for *us* with groanings which cannot be uttered ". Aided by His power and wisdom we shall pray rightly and effectively, and be answered by the gift of power to build up ourselves strongly upon the foundation of our most holy faith.

By so building and so praying we shall be enabled to obey the behest to keep ourselves in the love of God. And even so, we must still look on for **the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.** St. Jude is thinking of the Day of Judgement, the great assize in which

Jude 19–21. all men must stand before the judgement seat of Christ. He has already spoken of that day as awaiting the libertine teachers, even as it awaits the fallen angels and the sinners of the ancient world. And when the Day comes, Christians too, who have built themselves up upon the foundation of the faith, will need the Divine mercy, the mercy of Jesus Christ. It is well for us that He Who is the appointed Judge is also our Saviour and that He "is at the right hand of God" and "maketh intercession for us". Trusting in His mercy, we can continue to build, to pray and to hope **unto eternal life**, the final goal of all, the last great gift for which all God's other gifts prepare. This is the end to which St. Jude has led us, and—as Dr. McLaren beautifully reminds us—his words "are but the echo of the tenderer words of his Master and ours when He said 'As My Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love'".

"And on some have mercy, who are in doubt; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."—JUDE, 22, 23.

Jude 22–23. These two verses are beset by many difficulties both of reading and of translation, as the English reader will see who consults the notes in the margin of the R.V. It will suffice for our purpose to follow the readings adopted and the translation given in the text of the R.V., noting where necessary the difference from the A.V. It will be observed that in the text adopted by the A.V. St. Jude makes reference to *two* classes of people: in that of the R.V. he

refers to *three*. The latter is rather more in harmony with his division of topics in the general body of the Epistle. Jude 22–23.

In either case St. Jude is giving directions how those are to be dealt with who are in danger of being led astray by the libertines. The first two clauses, as given by the R.V., certainly seem to refer more particularly to these. The third clause may possibly include the libertines themselves. We cannot be quite sure whether St. Jude did or did not regard them as being beyond all hope of salvation.

And on some have mercy, who are in doubt. This rendering, adopted in the text of the R.V., seems to point to those who are drawn both ways and cannot at once make up their minds whether to stand by "the faith which was once for all delivered" or to follow the leading of those who claim to be progressives. They are perplexed and, says St. Jude, they are to be treated with kindly tenderness.

And some save, snatching them out of the fire. No hint is given as to the special characteristics of this second class. What St. Jude does say is that to save them, decisive or even violent action must be undertaken. We may perhaps infer that he is alluding to those who had got beyond the stage of perplexity and hesitation, and had already begun to participate in the licentious doings of the libertines. These are to be snatched "out of the fire", the fire of perdition in which they are now living. In using this phrase, St. Jude may have in his mind a reminiscence of the familiar passage in Zechariah iii. 2. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" The

Jude 22–23. figure is a homely but very expressive one. If a brand in the fire is already well alight, the only way to keep it from being completely consumed is to snatch it out of the fire. It is often the case, as those who are occupied in rescue work know well, that if anyone, man or woman, is caught in the grip of an evil and degrading environment, the only thing to do, if they are to be saved, is to snatch them away and remove them completely from it.

And on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. In speaking of this third class, St. Jude once again appeals for mercy to the sinner; but his warning is pointedly addressed to those who are setting out to save the sinner. He bids them remember that the evil with which their saving work will bring them into contact is a very insidious and infectious one, and they must take heed that they themselves do not fall victims to it. In using the figure of "the garment spotted by the flesh" he is probably still affected by reminiscences of the passage Zechariah iii. 1–4, in which Joshua was depicted as "clothed with filthy garments" and those that stood by were bidden to "take the filthy garments from off him". The obvious meaning of St. Jude's employment of the phrase is that the would-be rescuer, while being full of compassion for the sinner, should maintain an absolute abhorrence of the sin. And this can only be if the sympathy that is shown to the sinner is accompanied by "fear". Apart from this "fear" of which St. Jude here speaks, sympathy with the sinner is but too likely to become

sympathy with the sin. No form of so-called "rescue work" should be entered on with any light and easy confidence. It requires special consecration, special invocation of God's protecting strength. It is a sad fact that the track of many a crusade for "purity" is strewn with the fallen bodies of the crusaders themselves. St. Jude knew well the weakness of our human nature, and the warning that he uttered is still full of grave significance for all who enter, even with kindliest compassion, the company of those who have fallen and are stained by sin. Jude 22–23.

"Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen."—JUDE, 24, 25.

St. Jude has dwelt at large on the stream of moral corruption that was threatening to invade the Church; he has dwelt on the weakness of those who are in danger of being borne away by this stream, and on the risks in which those who would save them are involved. From this scene of mingled sin, weakness and danger, he now turns to God, and in turning to Him he becomes bright, joyous and confident. There is in his tone an echo of the exultation of the ancient prophet: "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." God not only reigns, but He rules. His children may have to walk along perilous paths, but He can keep them **from stumbling.** The end of the journey may be distant and the judgement which crowns the journey may be awe-inspiring, but Jude 24–25.

The Christian's Defence.

Jude 24-25. He will set them **before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy.** For He is not only the omnipotent God, but also the loving Saviour, Who, to save us "spared not His own Son". St. Jude exalts in the thought that this Divine glory is eternal, including in its scope the infinite past, the fleeting present, and the infinite future, and he adds his own word of adoring homage, his doxology to God for all that He is and for all that He does, offering it gratefully through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This doxology closely resembles the one that closes the Epistle to the Romans, with which St. Jude may have been familiar. It also has points of contact with that of Timothy i. 7. The opening words of it: "To Him that is able . . ." recall not only the Romans doxology, but the one into which St. Paul breaks out in Ephesians iii. 20: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think . . ." St. Jude has looked around him with anxiety, almost with dismay. Now he looks upward, and his heart becomes serene again with confidence and joy. His spirit is echoed in the words of Mrs. Barrett Browning:

> 'And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our incompleteness,—
> Round our restlessness,—His rest."

Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling. This translation of the Revisers brings out St. Jude's meaning more accurately than the A.V. "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling". The word "guard" suggests to us

better the idea of protection that he means to convey, and " stumbling " expresses more accurately than " falling " the danger from which we are saved. It is possible to stumble without actually falling, though a stumble may easily result in a fall. To be saved from even a stumble, gives the idea of a more wholesale and effective protection than to be saved from falling. And it is this comforting truth that St. Jude asserts. However slippery the path and however steep the precipice beside it, the Christian who trusts in God's care can traverse it with unfaltering steps, for God can guard him even from a stumble. He will not fall, for he will not even slip. Jude 24-25.

St. Jude says, " to Him that is *able* " and here again, we meet our constantly recurring paradox. He has told his readers to " Keep yourselves in the love of God " suggesting that while God loves them, the benefit of it depends upon themselves. He now directs their thoughts to the sustaining power of God, and yet, here too, with an implied condition. He does not say, absolutely, that " God will guard you " but he says that He is " *able* to guard you from stumbling ". He will do so if we ask Him ; He will afford us all the strength we need, if we depend upon Him. All His power is at our disposal, if we trust in Him. The Christian who stumbles and falls does so because He does not trust in Him Who is able to help him.

And to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy. The Greek verb here rendered " to set " and by the A.V. translators

Jude 24–25. "to present" literally means to "cause to stand". It may simply mean "to present", but some have seen in it a reference to the Judgement seat of Christ before which God is able to make the Christian "to stand". In either case he will stand "without blemish". This latter phrase better expresses the meaning of St. Jude's word than does the A.V. "faultless". In classical Greek the word had this meaning of "blameless" or "faultless", but in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it was especially used of sacrificial victims which must be "without blemish" in order to be suitable for being offered. In the New Testament it is used sometimes with reference to the sinlessness of Christ, sometimes with reference to the ideal perfection of Christians. St. Paul in Colossians i. 22, uses it with reference to the ultimate destiny of the Christian, in a sentence that closely resembles St. Jude's: "To present you holy and without blemish and unreproveable before Him". The thought is that those who have been kept by God from stumbling will appear before Him at the last as stainless as the lamb destined for sacrifice was required to be, in flawless purity. And the same moral as before must be drawn. We shall only appear "without blemish" in the presence of God, if we have been kept "from stumbling" by Him Who is able so to keep us if we trustfully depend upon His strength.

The Doxology.

To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord. The A.V. translators have put the word "wise" before God, following manuscripts which

had been affected by a reminiscence of the doxology in Romans. The word Saviour, it will be noted, is here applied to God. It is so applied in other New Testament passages, though in a still greater number it is applied to Christ. This twofold application serves to keep before our thoughts that the Son's work is the Father's work, that the Son loved us and came to us " for our salvation " because the Father loves us. He " so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ". The thought of a stern Father placated by a more compassionate Son is entirely alien to New Testament teaching. Jude 24–25.

Be **glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen.** There is no verb with these words in the Greek, and it is open to question whether they are a statement or, as the R.V. interprets them by inserting the word " be ", they are a prayer. Perhaps the latter is the preferable way in spite of the past reference in " before all time ". In praying for what may be " now and for evermore " the thought of the past comes in to add a note of joyous conviction. St. Jude may well exalt in what he believes to be already a fact and yet pray for its more perfect realization both now and in the ages of eternity.

If we are right in taking these words closely with the preceding " through Jesus Christ our Lord " we have clearly implied St. Jude's belief that Jesus Christ our Lord, the Saviour Who appeared on earth, existed with the Father before all time and is also the Eternal Son " for evermore ".

And so the Epistle ends upon a note of peace and

Jude 24–25. triumph. The earthquake and the rushing wind of stern denunciation are followed by the still small voice of quiet trust in God. St. Jude himself is revealed to us in it as a man of vigour and of candour, not only a faithful servant of his Lord, but, as it would seem, a student and follower of St. Paul. And it is probably because he estimated so highly St. Paul's doctrine of freedom in Christ that he deals so wrathfully with those whose teaching was a parody and base perversion of that doctrine. For he does deal wrathfully: with an unshrinking and unsparing hand he snatches the veil from the forms of wickedness that cloaked their vileness with the name of freedom. Those who shrink from exposing evil and describing it in the terms that it deserves, will probably view St. Jude's Epistle with grave and gentle disapproval, regarding it with regret as something less than truly Christian. But he said the thing that needed to be said, both to his age and to ours. He sees, and he speaks of, the exceeding sinfulness of sin. He speaks too of the Judgement that inevitably awaits it. And yet his temper is wholly Christian. His letter begins with a prayer and ends with a benediction. God can guard those who are His, and if they trust Him, He will bring them safely to the end, stainless and joyful to be with Him for ever. From eternity to eternity His power and majesty prevail and those whom He saves can have no higher joy than to confess and render to Him, through Jesus Christ, the homage that is His eternal due.

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